

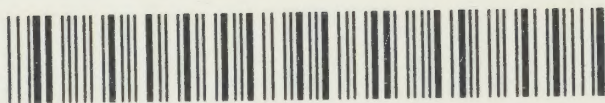
CANADIAN STATESMEN

EDITED BY W. STEWART WALLACE

# D'ARCY MCGEE



ALEXANDER BRADY



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CANADIAN STATESMEN ————— NUMBER II

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The Series edited by W. Stewart Wallace, Librarian  
of the University of Toronto.

THOMAS D'ARCY McGEE







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# THOMAS D'ARCY McGEE

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE

**I**N SEEKING information for this modest story of the life of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, I received the kind assistance of the staff in the Reference Library, Toronto, and also that of Dr. Doughty and his staff in the Dominion Archives, Ottawa. I must particularly acknowledge a debt to Mr. J. J. McGee of Ottawa, brother of T. D'Arcy McGee. He kindly allowed me to examine the material which he had collected concerning his distinguished brother. Finally, I am indebted to the editor of this series, Mr. W. S. Wallace, for helpful suggestions and criticisms.

A. B.



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# THOMAS D'ARCY McGEE

## CHAPTER I

### YOUTH

THOMAS D'ARCY McGEE had a unique place among the Canadian statesmen of his time. His life was replete with dramatic interest. Most of those who stood by the cradle of Confederation, wherever they had been born, were fashioned in their development by commonplace Canadian conditions and environment. Such was not the case with McGee. When he came to Canada, a young man of thirty-two, he had already gone through the crucible of varied experiences. In another land and under different conditions he had battled for a lost cause. He had risen quickly from impoverished boyhood to distinction. He had been a leader in an attempted revolution, a conspirator, a fugitive rebel, an exile. He had felt the thrill that comes to a poet, and the less intense satisfac-

tion that comes to the public leader. In the work that brought him fame, journalism, he had a career equalled by few in its meteoric character. He had been the editor or assistant editor of five newspapers, and on both sides of the Atlantic had borne a large share in intense controversies. He came to Montreal, in 1857, almost in the guise of an adventurer; and the portion of his life woven into the story of Canada was no less dramatic than that which preceded it. Within a few months of his arrival, he was elected to the colonial legislature; within a few years, he was honoured as one of the outstanding statesmen of the British colonies. In that venture of political faith which resulted in the establishment of the Dominion, he took a dominant share, and was generally acclaimed its most eloquent champion. His public life in Canada was crushed into ten years, but within that period his achievements had won him a permanent place in Canadian history. Yet in his career tragedy kept pace with brilliant success. He had no more than seen his cherished cause triumph when

his life was cut short by the bullet of a Fenian assassin, who mistook him for an enemy of Ireland.

Like Abraham Lincoln, also the victim of an assassin, McGee was born in a cottage. But the country and circumstances surrounding the birth of the two men were strikingly different. The hero of the American Civil War was reared amid the uncouth surroundings of the frontier. He never became freed from the social rawness of a community arising from a wilderness. McGee was born in the year 1825, at Carlingford, in the beautiful coast country of County Louth, Ireland. Carlingford is a shrine of natural beauty. It is washed by the blue waters of Carlingford Lough, and in the background are the Mourne Mountains with their ever alternating shadows and sunshine. In such congenial surroundings, rich in their associations with Ireland's heroic past, McGee's childhood was spent.

His father was a coast-guard, whose remote ancestors had been the famous Magees of Ulster. But it was chiefly from his mother, not his father, that McGee received his mental

inheritance. She was the daughter of a Dublin bookseller, by name Morgan, who had been implicated in the rebellion of 1798, and whose business as a consequence had been ruined. She was a woman of imagination, who cherished the memory of her father's espousal of the national cause and preserved all his national enthusiasms, which she sedulously fed to her son, Thomas D'Arcy. Her nationalism was not limited to the mere aspiration that Ireland possess political independence. She was interested in all the old Irish myths, traditions, and poetry, and these she related to her little "Tommie". Thus, from infancy, he grew up saturated in Irish literary lore, and an ardent idealist for the nationality of his country.

The simple facts respecting McGee's childhood scarcely need narrating. They are facts that might be recounted with respect to thousands of Irish boys of the same period. His father brought his family to Wexford when Thomas D'Arcy was eight years old, and McGee later in life always associated Wexford with his youth. In this city he ob-

tained the slender advantages of a day school education, and came under the influence of a stimulating personality, the famous Father Mathew. This marvellously effective apostle of temperance, who swayed the conduct of Irishmen as with a magic wand, was at the time carrying on his triumphant campaign in southern Ireland. His appeal touched McGee. Under Father Mathew's influence a juvenile temperance society was established in Wexford. One evening a slight boy with flat face, dark skin and hair, and wonderfully expressive eyes, delivered before the society a spell-binding oration, on which he received the hearty congratulations of the great priest. The boy was young McGee, and this was his first public speech. During the next two years, 1840-1842, "little Tommy McGee's" speeches drew large numbers to the society's meetings. But Wexford was not long to claim the boy orator. His mother had died, his father had remarried, and the family were not in affluent circumstances. Ireland in the forties held out few prospects to the children of the indigent. The economic structure of

Irish society was diseased. Approximately seven million were vainly endeavouring to wring a lean subsistence from the land, and hundreds of thousands were on the verge of famine. Gloom and misery were written broad over the southern counties, lit up but not relieved by the sputterings of political agitation. The one hope of the impoverished was the continent in the west, and a mighty stream of emigration to that land of promise set in. McGee joined the emigrant throng.

Accompanied by a sister, he arrived in the United States with few material possessions beyond the clothes on his back and a prize book won at school. The latter he disposed of during his first day in Boston in order that he might be able to sleep under a roof. His destination had been the home of an aunt in Rhode Island, but Boston, with its commercial activities and its hum of life, attracted him. In June, 1842, he repaired there to seek his fortune. Boston, like every large American city, had many immigrant boys seeking fortunes, and the hopes of the Irish lad must have shrunk away as the days of unemployment

passed and the empty future opened out. Then, suddenly, one of the many incidents which give a dramatic interest to McGee's life occurred. It was the practice of Bostonians, a patriotic people mindful of their history, to commemorate the Fourth of July with a civic celebration. At the close of a much applauded public address, a strange and very uncouth youth feverishly jumped on an old cart, and for half an hour delivered in a voice of thrilling melody an oration on the virtues of liberty. Unknown by a soul in the large throng, McGee was cheered for his audacity and success. Next morning, with still little hope of getting employment, he prepared to return to his aunt in Rhode Island. The story is related that he called at the office of the *Boston Pilot* with the purpose of procuring something to read on his journey. He was there recognized by the observant proprietor as the silver-tongued youth of the previous day. A conversation was opened which resulted in the offer of a position with the paper. This offer he accepted, and thus he became launched on the career

of journalism which dragged him, as it has dragged many obscure but talented youths, into the glaring light of publicity.

He had the powers certain to extract success: a quick and assimilative mind, an imagination that could clothe the dullest facts in the most appealing colours, and a marvellous facility in expressing himself. Within a few months he revealed that he was worth more than a mere clerkship, and became a travelling agent and special correspondent. To retain the support of those subscribers who were immigrant Irish, the prominent questions of Irish politics were threshed out in the columns of the *Pilot*. McGee proved invaluable in the presentation of Irish issues and in the vigorous championship of the chief plank in O'Connell's platform, repeal of the union of Great Britain and Ireland. The powers of his journalistic pen extended his fame throughout New England, and within two years he became, with Walter J. Walsh, joint editor of the *Pilot*. An editor of the age of twenty is not a common phenomenon. Still more uncommon is it when the youth in

question is at the same time winning a widely-extended reputation as a public speaker. In the forties, on both sides of the Atlantic, there was a passion for public lectures. Such great names as those of Carlyle, Emerson, and Dickens were associated with the movement. McGee's zeal to find expression led him to deliver public lectures throughout New England, and the magnetic charm of the born orator insured his success. Few public speakers could equal him in holding an audience enthralled.

The true instinct of the journalist—the desire to move public opinion—acting on a mind naturally brilliant, won for the young immigrant a local reputation in New England, but it also brought him into all those dusty controversies and conflicts inseparable from journalism. He found himself in vital battle with the settled prejudices of New England. The large immigration from Ireland had in this period begun to disturb old Bostonians, proud of their descent, fictitious or real, from the Pilgrim fathers. The leaven of Puritanism made them detest the faith of

the immigrants; their belief in the wholesome virtues of their racial stock made them resent the intrusion of the Celtic Irish; and their material well-being gave them a snobbish dislike of ragged and impoverished peasants from the bogs of Leinster and the rocky hillsides of Connaught. A boycott of Irish immigrants was launched, and against it McGee contended with all his youthful fire. Thus the first public cause for which he expended his energies was the recognition of his race and faith in the community life of New England. In essence his plea was for tolerance between class and class and sect and sect. The arguments that he advanced as youthful editor find a surprising echo in those which he used twenty years later in the Canadian provinces. It was only through the tolerant recognition of different sects and races that a new American community could be constituted. Prejudices and jealousies must be erased from social life, and the spirit of goodwill developed. It was a simple and ancient message, but one that McGee both in the United States and in Canada never failed to plead.

The defence of his countrymen led him in 1845 to publish his first book, *Historical Sketches of O'Connell and His Friends*. It is written with the nervous eloquence and facility of all his later works. The most significant fact about it was the hero-worship which he lavished upon the great Irish liberator. "In him," he enthusiastically wrote, "liberty will boast a model for all her future reformers." In his later Canadian career McGee showed himself a consistent disciple of his hero of 1845. He was a follower of O'Connell in his implicit faith in attaining political visions by moving first the popular mind through oratory and the press. O'Connell is generally remembered as an agitator, but he was something more than the word ordinarily connotes. He was a political educator, and a political educator of O'Connell's type McGee always aspired to be.

In the year which witnessed the publication of his eulogy of O'Connell, McGee's fame spread beyond Boston and its New England environs. Indeed, his articles on Repeal were read with keen and satisfied interest in the

club rooms of Dublin. O'Connell himself paid him a compliment by publicly referring to his editorials as "the inspired writings of a young exiled Irish boy in America." John Gray, proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*, which was O'Connell's pillar of support, considered McGee's journalistic talent worthy of enlistment in the service of his paper. He offered him a liberally paid position. The result was that McGee returned to Dublin. Only three years had elapsed since his departure, but they were years which had witnessed his rise from the position of a poor immigrant boy, not unlike thousands who yearly crossed in the steerage to be lost in the human eddies of American cities, to that of a newspaper editor with a reputation in America and a certain distinction in Ireland. The rapid pace of his rise measures in some degree his quantity of inborn talent and his determination to hew success from the most untoward circumstances.

His position with the *Freeman* brought him to London as a political correspondent. He had thus the advantage of viewing from

the close range of the press gallery the working of parliamentary institutions, and we may assume that it enabled him to store away political and constitutional precedents for future use. But his political articles did not please the proprietor of the *Freeman*. The cause is to be found in the fact that they showed the influence of a group of young men with whom McGee on his return came to be associated, and who profoundly influenced his whole development. This group was the party of Young Ireland. At this period, Thomas Davis, a blending of poet and man of affairs, was the guiding mind of the group, and the *Dublin Nation* was its organ of opinion. The leaders were all men of talent; a few were men of genius. Next to Davis as an active and persuasive writer was Charles Gavan Duffy, destined later to win political laurels in Australia, and to leave no mean name in the records of imperial statesmanship. John Blake Dillon, father of a subsequent Irish nationalist leader, was another forceful member of the group. Thomas Francis Meagher, in whose character were entwined the chivalry

of the soldier, the clear judgment of the statesman, and the emotional intensity of the poet, was a third. Other names might be mentioned. There was John Mitchel, a man of uncompromising mind and a writer of powerful prose; Devin Reilly, a brilliant but rancorous youth, who in the next year was to consider McGee as his rival; and James Mangan, a poet of wasted genius.

All of these men were young. Few of them were over thirty. With that hopefulness which is the gift of youth, they were driven by the ideal of recreating Ireland by awakening her national consciousness. Their task was similar to that of their great contemporary, Mazzini, in Italy. They sought to arouse the Irish people to act for the national good, to sink all sectarian animosities and class prejudices which tended to dissipate the nation's energy on trifling ends. Their outlook was not limited to material welfare or bare political liberty. They endeavoured to revivify the cultural life of Ireland, to give a more vital direction to its art, and to develop a more intense literature. Their

cherished motto was "Educate that you may be free."

Soon after his return from America, McGee met the members of this group, and readily subscribed to their doctrines and shared their enthusiasms. Their ideas were new food for his mind, and he never wholly shed the influence of their fervid idealism. When he later pleaded the cause of Canadian nationality, he did so in the spirit and through the inspiration of the Young Ireland creed. We have from the pen of Gavan Duffy an interesting impression of McGee, when he became a disciple of Young Ireland: "The young man was not prepossessing. He had a face of almost African type, his dress was slovenly even for the careless class to which he belonged, he looked unformed and had a manner which struck me at first sight as too deferential for self-respect. But he had not spoken three sentences in a singularly sweet and flexible voice till it was plain that he was a man in whom one might dimly discover rudiments of the orator, poet and statesman hidden under the ungainly disguise." Need-

less to say, Duffy gladly welcomed such a promising recruit in his loosely formed association.

McGee's new alliance damaged his connection with the *Freeman*. His articles tended to be too speculative and not sufficiently of the sober-suited type desired by the commercial classes who supported O'Connell and the *Freeman*. Moreover, he came to spend more time in the British Museum digging up the materials for Irish history than in the press gallery following the ingenuities of Peel's politics. His best literary efforts, which absorbed most of his time, were his articles for the *Nation*, and the tone of these was not acceptable to O'Connell. Finally, Gray, becoming dissatisfied, brought his engagement to a close. Duffy, who valued McGee's talent highly, immediately employed him as London correspondent for the *Nation*, and until his flight from Ireland in 1848 he remained an expounder, through the press, of Young Ireland's varying hopes and policies. Sectarian prejudices and colourless enthusiasm for the national cause all encountered his

virulent denunciation, and he sought in accordance with the *Nation's* prospectus "to direct the popular mind and the sympathies of educated men of all parties to the great end of nationality."

Meanwhile events in Ireland were hurrying to a dismal crisis. At the end of 1845 the famine had begun to creep gloomily over the land, and within the next nine months it had the country in its relentless grip. Despair prevailed everywhere, except in Dublin, where the calamity merely drove the political parties to more feverish controversies. The Young Irelanders were breaking with O'Connell and his repeal agitation. On the founding of the *Nation* in 1842, Davis and his associates had strongly supported the O'Connellite movement, but as time passed the difficulties of co-operation between the younger men and the old agitator became manifest. For a generation O'Connell had been the uncrowned king of Ireland. He had swayed her masses with his fertile brain and facile tongue. His triumph in the movement of Catholic emancipation, when he had

conquered Wellington and convinced Peel, had given him a confidence which was now proving fatal. In the forties of the century he was reaching the sere and yellow leaf of his career, but his ambition to maintain an unquestioned control of Irish affairs remained as keen as ever, and prompted him to look with critical suspicion upon the Young Ireland group. It is the lot of old men seldom to understand the generation that hurriedly presses behind them with its new hopes and fresh methods. They view its visions with frank uneasiness, and in the rheumy conservatism of age condemn its vibrant actions as erratic and destructive. It was so with O'Connell. He mocked the Young Ireland talk of recreating the nation, he scorned its literary aspirations, he suspected its condemnation of sectarianism, and he distrusted its methods. In 1846, the Young Irelanders under the stress of the famine had begun to talk of following the precedent of Pym and Hampden and winning political liberty for Ireland by the sword; they who had been content merely to champion the Irish cultural

renaissance, now proclaimed that Ireland could not be saved alone by poetry. She must have action. But O'Connell, who had been taught prudence by long and exacting experiences, condemned this rash talk. The younger generation in Ireland took his prudence as timidity, and spurned his words of caution.

The elements of disruption long existing between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders ripened in July, 1846, when the younger men seceded from the Repeal Association. But the critical nature of affairs consequent upon the famine once more herded together the national leaders, and in February, 1847, a Repeal Confederation was formed with objects somewhat similar to those of the former association. The formation of this Confederation marked McGee's first participation in active politics. He had hurried back from the calm atmosphere of London to the hectic politics of Dublin, and was made a councillor of the Confederation. It is unnecessary to follow his manœuvres amongst the Dublin politicians. We catch a glimpse of him in

the comments of a country gentleman who had dropped in to hear the debates in the Confederation. He was at the outset very much displeased at seeing a mere boy, ill-dressed and singularly ugly, rise to address an assembly which had as its object the saving of Ireland. But his displeasure vanished, and he was seized with amazement when he found the boy with smiling confidence deliver a statesmanlike oration that captivated his audience. McGee had, moreover, other acquirements in addition to oratory, for the council sufficiently prized his executive ability to make him its secretary.

The fates quickly precipitated events in Ireland. In the spring of 1847 O'Connell died, and his death plunged the nationalist movement into a morass. "The king of the forest is dead," wrote a contemporary, "and there is neither lion nor lion's cub to fill his vacant place." John O'Connell, the Liberator's son, aspired to the leadership formerly held by his father, but he was not a lion. He was wholly unable to act with McGee and the Young Irelanders, and all possibility of

united action on Irish affairs vanished. Following the French Revolution of February, 1848, which transferred revolutionary enthusiasm to Ireland as to every other country in Europe, John Mitchel, with the recklessness and Ishmaelite characteristics of a born revolutionist, preached an armed uprising. Others, including McGee, suddenly echoed his sentiments, and revolutionary clubs sprang into being. These constituted in June a special executive to which they were to yield obedience.

McGee became a member of the executive committee of five and went to his task of creating a revolution with flushed enthusiasm. A venture promising a quick fame and success to the public cause presented itself. A delegate arrived from the Irish Confederates at Glasgow stating that they had a considerable supply of arms and ammunition, and if a known and daring leader were sent them, four or five hundred men would volunteer for an expedition to Ireland. They might seize a steamer on the Clyde, and sail for Sligo or Killala. Thus, by a diversion in

the west, they could strike British power a blow from the rear. There was too much of a dramatic appeal in this adventure for McGee to refuse when it was suggested that he be the leader. Visions of emulating Paul Jones danced before his mind, and away he sped the same evening for Scotland, while his associates matured their plans in Ireland.

With rapid dispatch McGee consulted the Irish revolutionists in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Greenock, and enrolled four hundred volunteers. The crew of a steamer sailing from Greenock was won over, and it was arranged that the arms should be placed on board as merchandise. While he was developing his plans, McGee was recognized by the police; and, his arrest being under consideration, the revolutionary committee insisted that he leave immediately and proceed to Sligo, where he could extemporize arrangements for the landing of the expedition. He reached Sligo early in August, and there awaited developments, scanning the rocky and picturesque shores of Lough Gill in the character of a Dublin student on holiday.

The news that finally reached him shattered his hopes. He learned how Smith O'Brien had led his insurgents to the so-called battle of Ballingarry, which ended, pantomine-like, in Widow McCormack's cabbage patch. O'Brien, Meagher, McManus, and other leaders, he heard, were in the hands of the government, and the revolutionary organization had collapsed like a punctured balloon. The peasantry, on whom the success of the movement finally depended, were more eager to escape in emigrant ships from an impoverished country than to fight for a revolutionary government.

To America McGee's eyes were immediately turned. He made his way to Derry, where the bishop and his clergy sheltered him. Thence in the dress of a priest, with his breviary in his hand and with a sad heart, he boarded a brig at the mouth of the Foyle, and sailed for the United States. He became one of the many disillusioned who in this year of unfulfilled revolutions streamed across the Atlantic. His departure from Ireland was not, however, as he might have

thought, the close, but the more vital opening, of his career. In America he began at the age of twenty-three a new life in which he was destined to plead for causes that were to prove more successful than that of Irish independence in 1848.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

IN EARLY October, 1848, McGee arrived in Philadelphia, and before the close of the month he was in the exciting swirl of American journalism. He established the *New York Nation*, patterned much after the *Dublin Nation*. It was frankly an Irish-American organ which gave special attention to the politics of Ireland, and to the means whereby Irishmen in the new world might advance the interests of their native country. It was written with that intense bitterness towards Britain characteristic of the journals of most exiled Irishmen. It is interesting to find the man who in 1868 was described by Lord Mayo as "the most eloquent advocate of British rule on the face of the world" vowing in 1848 to dedicate all his days to the ruin of British power. But McGee's opinions were to travel a changeful journey between these two dates.

His prospects in New York were promising. Although young, he had already a wide reputation as an Irish leader, and a large population in New York and the neighbouring states was prepared to support his paper. But youthful rashness damaged his prospective success. Soon after his arrival in America, he wrote some public letters attributing the failure of the Irish revolutionary movement to the influence of the clergy. He argued that they were primarily responsible for the fact that the peasantry had not risen at the critical moment. Such a reflection upon the patriotism of the Irish clergy brought into the field against McGee an experienced and formidable controversialist in Bishop Hughes of New York. The bishop had proved his steel in many a public duel, and his ardent Irish patriotism had given him a vast prestige over his flock. Having closely followed affairs in Ireland, he was well prepared to meet McGee's challenge. He argued that blame for the failure of the insurrection must not be placed upon the clergy, but upon the leaders of Young Ireland, prominent among

whom was McGee himself. They had precipitated a rebellion for which they had made no serviceable preparation, and thus exposed the peasantry to destruction by British soldiery. The priests, by restraining their flocks from rebellion, had alone saved them from disaster. Bishop Hughes was not content with such argument. He denounced McGee as being faithless to his church and creed, which elicited from the latter the reply that "My crime is not that I do not believe in the creed of my fathers and my affections, but that I have failed to pay my court to some great unknown who sits chafing on his chair, impatient of his daily dose of honied praises."

The futile controversy that ensued proved fatal to the fortunes of McGee's paper. His joust with the most powerful Catholic ecclesiastic in America alienated the sympathies of those who might otherwise have given him support. He had jockeyed himself into the false position of being anti-clerical, a position which in the nineteenth century seldom won the support of Irish Catholics. The situation was all the more unfortunate in that he held

many views in common with Bishop Hughes, and was later to become his warm friend. In the midst of the controversy, he received from Gavan Duffy an invitation to assist once more in the editing of the *Dublin Nation*. Duffy wrote with the enticing remark that "as a writer and a speaker there is not any Irishman living whose help I would as soon have as yours." All the weight of pleasant associations tugged at him to return. In his youthful verse a dominant note was a longing for his native land:

Where'er I turned, some emblem still  
Roused consciousness upon my track;  
Some hill was like an Irish hill,  
Some wild-bird's whistle call'd me back.

But the vision of leading the Irish in America had captivated his imagination, and he refused Duffy's offer. None the less he determined to shift the scene of his work. He sold out the *Nation*, went to Boston, and in August, 1850, established his second paper, the *American Celt*.

During the next seven years, his career was that of an itinerant and rather restless

journalist. In 1851 he was publishing the *Celt*, and championing the interests of the Irish in Buffalo. The following year, he was in New York, feverishly dashing off editorials to guide his Catholic countrymen through the stormy passages of mid-century American politics. There are few recess periods in the career of political journalism. It is an incessant battle demanding continuous vigilance and tireless effort. McGee, in New York, fully experienced its exacting claims, and satisfied them sufficiently to make his paper the most powerful Irish-American organ of the period.

The fifties were a stirring decade in the history of the American republic. They were marked by an intense feverishness in politics as the question of slavery loomed higher on the horizon. The giant strides of material development, the pushing back of the frontier by the advancing lines of railway, the expansion of commerce, the marvellous growth of population, all added a buoyancy to American life which tended to draw newcomers into its tide. Carl Schurz, the young German revolutionist of 1848, was only a few years in the

country when he became a party leader, swinging the votes of the western Germans in support of the Republican platform. Similarly many of McGee's fellow Young Irelanders became champions of American parties. John Mitchel's brilliant, but bitter pen was enlisted in the service of the Democrats. McGee, however, kept free from the meshes of party affiliations. Throughout his career of journalism in New York, he continued to consider himself as a new immigrant fighting the battles of the new immigrants. He set himself to be the sentinel and champion of his people, to safeguard their interests, and to direct their development amid the plastic conditions of American society. It was no easy task. In the twelve odd years following the famine, emigration from Ireland to the United States continued in a steady stream. Between 1846 and 1851, a quarter of a million left Ireland each year; between 1851 and 1861, over 100,000 left annually. Most of these found their destination in the American cities of the Atlantic seaboard. McGee saw their need of leadership. They were chiefly pea-

sants and small farmers, pushed from their land in Ireland by famine and eviction. Concerning the relentless struggle of city life they knew nothing. Of the political issues of American cities they had no knowledge, and their ignorance exposed them to the ready wiles of ward bosses in search of votes. Promises were readily made to them and as readily unfulfilled. But, above all, their political position and interests were endangered in the fifties by the rise of the famous Know-Nothing party, with which McGee was in warfare during the greater portion of his residence in New York.

Know-Nothingism was a development of the native American movement of the forties. The support tendered by the Irish immigrants to the Democrats had assisted in the disorganization and severe defeat of the Republican party. Hence many disappointed Republican leaders determined to form an organization which should withhold political rights from European newcomers. At first they organized a secret fraternity called the "Know-Nothings" from "I don't know," the

ever-repeated reply of its members to inquiry about its nature. The original name bestowed upon the fraternity by its founders was "The Sons of '76", or the "Order of the Star-Spangled Banner"; and its slogan was "America for the Americans." Its favourite counter-sign was the traditional order of Washington, "Put none but Americans on guard to-night." The national sentiment behind the society was reinforced by Protestant sectarian zeal, since its organizers were concerned not merely with depriving immigrants of power, but with excluding all Catholics from office.

Thanks to the allure of its novelty, this party developed with phenomenal rapidity. In 1854 its candidates swept the elections in Massachusetts, and Gardiner, its nominee, became governor of the state. Its members sought to control nomination for office by secret conventions of delegates. They bound themselves to cast no votes for any except Protestant-born citizens, and endeavoured to alter the naturalization laws so that foreigners might not be allowed to vote until they had resided twenty-one years in the country. The

Know-Nothing party could never have had more than temporary success. As Horace Greeley, the noted editor of the *New York Tribune*, remarked, it "would seem as devoid of the elements of persistence as an anti-cholera or an anti-potato-rot party would be." But McGee, like other leaders of the swelling Irish population, was alarmed at its growing strength. It threatened to proscribe the men of his faith, and to exclude from the exercise of political rights immigrants like himself who sought a new home in the republic. In the columns of the *Celt*, he attacked its aims, assailed its champions, and marshalled Irish-American opinion against it. There is little doubt that this conflict, in which McGee was engaged during the last five years of his residence in New York, did much to disillusion him in respect to American life and institutions.

A few years before he had written the lines:

Hail to the land whose broad domain  
Rejoices under Freedom's reign  
Where neither right nor race is banned.

But he no longer viewed the republic as a Utopia. He now discovered that the so-called

land of freedom was a land of intolerance, and his migration to Canada was largely due to the action of the Know-Nothing faction. As he later remarked, "I did not want to be a citizen on sufferance, as it were, courted one day and proscribed the next."

But McGee served the immigrants in other ways than by fighting the Know-Nothing platform. He encouraged them to seek their own self-development. He preached the homely precepts of industry, and urged them to study the laws and customs of their new country in order to be able to view intelligently its problems. The most helpful assistance that could be rendered to the indigent newcomers was to provide them with the facilities for education. During his early residence in Boston, McGee had realized this, and it was due largely to his labours that night schools for adults were engrafted on the educational system. The same work he now earnestly promoted in New York, with benefit to immigrants of every race. But his most emphatic plea was that his countrymen should move from the crowded tenements and con-

gested industries of the eastern cities to the homestead lands of the West. "We must," he wrote in the *Celt*, "urge them on and on. We must shame them out of cellars and sewers, and endeavour by every art to awaken in their hearts the passion for competency, so natural and laudable in a new and unsettled country." For a time he had the dream of establishing an Irish state in the western territories—an inland Erin—which should draw thither the Irish immigrants. For this purpose, in 1856, he took a leading part in calling a conference of leading Irish Americans at Buffalo. Although the dream of an Irish state in the west was not realized, McGee's advocacy of western settlement was not futile. Many flourishing homesteads in Illinois and Wisconsin bore witness to the zeal with which he advocated western colonization.

By 1852 a considerable change had taken place in McGee's thought. When he had reached Philadelphia in the autumn of 1848, he was a revolutionist with all that lack of compromise which accompanies youth. He shared the idealism of the ardent patriots

who had been prepared to take any and every means for the quick attainment of Irish freedom. As one Young Irelander had said: "If the altar stood in the way of national liberty, then down with the altar." The path to Ireland's freedom should, if necessary, cut through every institution and be impeded by no consideration. But four years of controversial journalism in America shook McGee's former revolutionary faith. In a letter to a friend, published in the *Celt*, he confessed that in the past he had been on the wrong track. He found that he had neglected some of the primary principles which govern the world. In the future he was determined to put all political action to the test of a simple creed, the chief tenet of which was a belief in Christendom and the Catholic church. The revolutionary liberalism which sought in the name of liberty to tear down the church and other institutions was reprehensible, and to be resisted. It is not to be assumed that by this profession of faith McGee suddenly, in 1852, saw, like Paul on the Damascus road, a new light. The fact is that in Ireland he had been

a revolutionist largely by the accident of events. By temperament he had none of those Ishmaelite characteristics which go to make the revolutionary. "My native disposition," he declared in the Canadian parliament some years later, "is towards reverence for things old, and veneration for the landmarks of the past." Away from Ireland's hectic politics his temperament reasserted itself. His reverence for things old fed his loyalty to his church, and led him henceforth to discountenance all movements for the freeing of Ireland which did not receive its conservative sanction. As subsequent events show, he remained the champion of reform for his native land, as for the country of his adoption, but he was ever emphatic in his denunciation of the violent methods of conspiracy and revolution. His change of front brought him into friction with many Irish Americans like John Mitchel and the founders of Fenianism, and this fact, linked with the existence of Know-Nothingism, largely explained his departure to Canada in 1857.

McGee at various times had made visits to the British colonies. He had delivered

public lectures in Montreal. He had summered on Lake Huron, had written letters to his paper from the upper Ottawa, and had passed through the rich meadows and orchards of the Annapolis valley in Nova Scotia. At all times he was struck with the orderly and secure society of the British provinces, while his imagination had been kindled by the magnificent future which stretched before them. He early visualized them as the germ cells of a new nation. He was, therefore, prepared in 1857 to accept readily the invitation of some Canadian Irishmen to become their leader in Lower Canada. A delegation consisting of such prominent Irish Canadians of the period as Frank Smith, Patrick Brennan, and James Donnelly went to New York, interviewed McGee, and obtained his acceptance of their invitation. In the spring of 1857 he moved to Montreal, and there began his Canadian career.

To McGee British North America seemed on the threshold of a new and promising era. The steam-boat was drawing the provinces closer to Britain. The telegraph and Atlantic

cable were making possible more intimate co-operation between the various provinces themselves, and between them and the mother country. The building of railways promised in the near future to bridge the dreary distances of forest and rock which severed the various colonies from one another and kept them as far apart as Europe is from America. In addition to these facts was another laden with rich hope, the prospective annexation to the Canadas of the vast hinterland then under the dominion of the Hudson's Bay Company. What are now the rolling wheat fields of Manitoba and Saskatchewan were in 1857 merely the hunting grounds of trappers, employed by one of the mightiest of British mercantile corporations. Yet there were some men who had caught a glimpse of the potential value of those extensive lands beyond Lake Superior. They described them as the natural field of expansion for the eastern colonies and advocated their annexation. Under the inspiration of these pregnant facts, McGee in May, 1857, established in Montreal a tri-weekly paper, called the *New Era* as indicative of the time of its birth.

The paper had too brief a career to exercise much influence on public life. Moreover, in 1857, McGee, as a newcomer, was of necessity feeling his way amid the shoals and narrows of Canadian politics, and was unable to discuss local issues with intimacy. None the less, the *New Era* has an outstanding significance in Canadian history. It was the first newspaper in the British colonies dedicated to the cause of colonial union and the establishment of a British American nationality under the rule of a royal prince. It advanced the chief arguments for union employed eight years later at the conferences of Charlottetown and Quebec. It pleaded an aspiration not finally realized for another ten years. To McGee nothing seemed more apparent than that the Canadas and the colonies by the sea should form the nucleus of a nation. The essential means was the development of a common will strong enough to overcome the obstacles in the way of closer co-operation.

The vision of a united British America was not new. It was as old as the existence

of the colonies. It grew naturally out of the presence of a number of scattered communities whose common interests could best be served by a common government. Previous to the American Revolution the great Franklin had advocated such a union for the thirteen colonies. After the Revolution it found many champions in the territories which remained under the British crown. In 1790, while the Constitutional Act for the Canadian provinces was being fashioned, Chief Justice Smith suggested a plan for the comprehensive government of all the colonies. In the succeeding years, many others made similar suggestions—Uniacke in Nova Scotia, Sewell in Quebec, William Lyon Mackenzie, the fiery Canadian agitator, and John Beverley Robinson, an Upper Canadian who had pondered long and carefully on colonial issues. Even the distinguished name of Lord Durham was associated with the idea. He recommended it as the one means of developing for the colonies a British American nationality, which should rival the robust and aggressive nationality across the southern frontier.

After 1850, the conception was dragged into the daylight of practical politics. A number of prominent Canadians saw in it the one solvent of the constitutional difficulties arising from the Union Act of 1841. In April, 1856, A. A. Dorion, leader of the Lower Canadian Liberals, pleaded in parliament for the federal union of the two Canadas. Thus, the idea had already entered the stage of practical discussion when McGee established his *New Era*. But with the politicians it was entertained largely as a gateway of escape from the political embarrassments of the existing system, and was made subsidiary to party considerations. McGee in his paper fired it with a wider emotional appeal. With him it was not the product of close grappling with the political difficulties of the Union Act, but a poet's vision. It was a dream in the fulfilment of which lay a mighty future for all the peoples of British North America. With a newcomer's freshness of observation, he saw in the colonies possibilities of development which had lain largely unnoticed by the public men of the colonies. He thought as

much of the social and spiritual consequences of union as of the political. It would not merely provide the British provinces with the strength of a common government, but would knit the scattered colonists into a united, self-reliant people, with a common will and common hopes, the true evidence of nationality. Union would carve the way for the emergence of a great new northern nation. It would provide the people with vision, and destroy the cramping parochialism of their existing political life.

In British American union, McGee at last discovered a cause that vividly appealed to his imagination. He found it on taking up residence in Montreal, and it shaped his career in the succeeding ten years. It replaced in his sentiments his former fervour for Irish liberty. In its advocacy he never grew weary, and the decade previous to Confederation found no more fervid apostle of British American union and nationality than McGee. He pleaded it, not merely through the press, but on the public platform. Being in demand as a lecturer, he used every occasion to unfold

his favourite subject. In one of his most famous addresses, delivered at Ottawa on October 9, 1857, he arrayed the various arguments for union. "If we extend our vision so as to embrace all British North America, we survey a region larger than all Europe. If we have no coal, Nova Scotia has abundance. If Newfoundland has an indifferent soil, this Ottawa valley can grow wheat enough to supply all that is required. Throughout this wider view we find at least four millions already in the field—one quarter more than laid the neighbouring republic. Nature pronounces for the union of the provinces. Canada needs a sea-coast."

In addition to the arguments drawn from geography and economic needs were others no less cogent. Union was imperative for defence. Political weakness was always a tempting bait to a neighbouring power. The great resources of the British colonies combined with their lack of unity might well induce the American republic to attempt conquest. Especially was the St. Lawrence waterway tempting to the United States,

since in the course of time it must become the shipping route for the wheat harvests of the West. The power in possession of it would control the chief roadway to the grain fields. In addition the colonies had other resources for which union alone could give adequate protection, rich fisheries, extensive forests, fertile lands. "Facts are logical, and unless we dream that the laws of cause and effect will be suspended in our favour, we must look either to the internal union or the political extinction of these provinces at no distant day." Not merely would the wealthy natural resources of British North America be preserved, but they would best be developed by the consolidation of the colonies into one state. With such a system McGee looked forward to Canada possessing, by the close of the century, 25,000,000 people. Moreover, he anticipated the appearance of all the other more brilliant, if less tangible, accomplishments of national life, which had difficulty in arising under the existing political disunion, a native literature, with developments in art, science, and philosophy.

McGee went further than marshalling arguments for union. He described in general terms the nature of the constitution suitable for the colonies. He considered it neither desirable nor possible that the various provinces with their diverse geographical characters and economic interests should be fused into one political unit. "Our river system indicates our union, railroads and canals will strengthen these natural bonds, but complete oneness of political life must still be wanting to sea-beaten Newfoundland and the wheat-bearing West." The same geographical facts which pressed the need of union made the recognition of local autonomy imperative. The new constitution must be federal, allowing a large measure of local autonomy, while constituting a central government to deal with common interests. Many of the leading Fathers of Confederation, most prominent among whom was Sir John A. Macdonald, began with the suggestion of a legislative union, and only with reluctance in the heat of constitution-building recognized the need of federal institutions. But with

keen insight McGee saw from the outset that only federation could be the goal of British Americans. Provincial governments with the recognition of certain provincial rights would be a guarantee of liberty in the new state.

In December, 1857, an additional field was opened in which McGee might extend the advocacy of his new found cause. A body of citizens in Montreal nominated him for parliament, and in the ensuing contest he was elected as one of the three representatives of the city. Thus began the most constructive venture of his career.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROPHET OF CANADIAN NATIONALITY

**M**cGEE entered Canadian politics at a crucial period. Most of the old issues over which political battles had been fought were disappearing. Responsible Government in principle at least was recognized by all parties. The Clergy Reserves, which had frequently ruffled the peace of provincial politics, had in 1854 been settled with reasonable satisfaction to those concerned. In the same year the thorny question of seigniorial tenure in Lower Canada had received its quietus. A chapter of hoary Canadian controversies was closed, and a chapter with the newer problems of the United Canadas opened. One of the most prominent aspects of the new era was the appearance of railways. Quaint locomotives, mere playtoys in comparison with the huge masses of steel which now rumble over the Canadian lines, began to glide by the snake fences of the farmer, and

introduced a new touch to the Canadian landscape and a new issue to Canadian politics. The incorporation of railways as the promised means of developing the Canadas became the absorbing subject with provincial statesmen, and the parliamentary debates became bulky with all the dry details of railway management. But the most ominous problem of the time was that of attempting to work the scheme of union established by the Act of 1841. In the years immediately following 1858 the union underwent its severest tests, and began to fail as an effective means of government. Amid the accumulating difficulties of politicians, the Confederation movement had its rise. In this movement McGee from the outset played a vital role.

The first important question confronting McGee in 1857 was the choice of a party. Canadian parties in the period were notoriously unsteady. Prominent men readily shed old alliances for new ones, and this readiness for change gave a makeshift appearance to party affiliations. The legislature was like a

ballroom in its quick shifting of political partners. There were four distinct groups. In Lower Canada the Reformers were known as the *Parti Rouge*, and were led by A. A. Dorion, a very able but doctrinaire Liberal. Following the elections of December, 1857, this group was a small minority, thanks largely to the nimble-mindedness and dynamic energy of George E. Cartier, leader of the *Bleus*, the opposing group. In Upper Canada the government party, known as Liberal-Conservatives, was led by John A. Macdonald, and the Reformers were under the command of George Brown. With the latter were loosely associated a small band who followed Sandfield Macdonald, and were known as Sandfield Macdonald's "tail". On McGee's entrance to the legislature, the government was described as the Macdonald-Cartier administration. During the next four years it was preserved in power by the majority of Lower Canadian members, marshalled by Cartier, and a number of Upper Canadians drawn by the winning personality of John A. Macdonald.

In view of McGee's subsequent career, it is possible that he might in 1857 have accepted a nomination from the party of Macdonald and Cartier. Certain considerations drew him to support Dorion and the *Parti Rouge*, but they were hardly of a nature to overcome the strong attraction of a warm welcome from the government party. Such a welcome was not extended. The fact is that those in power were somewhat dubious concerning this new man, with his chequered career and his reputation for brilliance. One who, only ten years before, had been a rebel against the Queen might not prove of much help to a party in a colony where loyalty was fashionable. Political leaders before investing in new stock must be sure of a good return, and in this case they were in doubt. McGee did not receive their nomination. Hence he gave his support to the *Rouges*, with whom he had more genuine sympathy. It is interesting that he thus entered Canadian political life as an advanced reformer, the opponent of John A. Macdonald, with whom his name was later linked. In the election of December, 1857, Dorion stood

at the top of the poll in Montreal with his follower, McGee, a close second. The other four candidates trailed behind with Cartier at the bottom, five hundred votes below McGee.

Some eighteen months after his election, McGee outlined in four public letters to his Irish-Canadian constituents his views on Canadian parties. They adequately explain why for four years he supported the Opposition, consorting with Dorion, George Brown, and other uncompromising opponents of the Cartier-Macdonald ministry. He attributed to the *Bleus* an exclusive Canadianism. They had no wish to welcome immigrants, for they dreamed of a French Canada existing isolated, alone, and still French on the map of North America. Their conception of French-Canadian nationality was too narrow to allow the development of a broad conception of Canadian nationality, so essential in a land of warring sects and races. The *Rouges*, on the other hand, were more in touch with modern tendencies, and more disposed to recognize as their Canadian countrymen the newer

immigrants who spoke a different tongue and were of another race. In them the Irish Canadians of Lower Canada could find more congenial allies than among the *Bleus*. McGee on this occasion worked in his own fervid gospel of a nationality, which would recognize distinctions of neither race nor creed: "For my own part, I respect every nationality represented on our soil; but yet I hold we should consider them rather as invaluable materials to a desired end, than as finalities themselves. I hope to see the day, or at least the eve of the day, when there will be no other term to our patriotism, but the common name of Canadian, without the prefix of either French or British."

He advised his Catholic countrymen in Upper Canada that they support in their section of the province the Reform party of George Brown. Brown was something of a knight errant. He was bold in tilting with abuses, and ever ready to ride about the colony in search of them. McGee was won by Brown's frank, fearless character. Moreover, he believed that the Irish Catholics of Upper

Canada could subscribe with little reservation to the Reform leader's principles. They shared with Brown a hostility to the intolerant Toryism of the old school, and entertained his faith in the widest extension of popular suffrage, economy in public expenditure, and reduction in taxation. But there were two issues on which McGee was not in harmony with Brown. He did not believe that the adoption of representation by population would, as Brown so ardently argued, heal the ills of Canadian government. Also, contrary to the belief of the Upper Canadian, he thought that separate religious schools should receive more definite recognition by the provincial legislature. These questions were to arise frequently during his political career, and a statement of his position on them may be conveniently postponed.

In March, 1858, the parliamentary session began. From the outset, McGee hurried into the leading debates, and attacked the "corruptionists", as the government party was described, with all the weapons of polished wit and searching sarcasm. His reputation as

an orator had preceded him, and his maiden speech was eagerly awaited. None of the assembled legislators was disappointed. A press correspondent wrote that McGee had scarcely spoken three sentences in a silvery, penetrating mezzo-soprano before he had the audience in that pleasurable grip which only the highly endowed orator can attain. "Of loud declamation," wrote another contemporary observer, "there was not a vestige, and scarcely a change of attitude. He merely placed the finger of his right hand occasionally on the palm of his left, then let both hands fall by his sides, or on occasion lifted the right hand in solemn warning, but as he warmed up a magnificent period with an appeal to the justice of his cause, or the manhood of his country, his whole frame shook, light darted from his eyes, he was so to say transfigured." The correspondent of the *Globe* wrote that he was "undoubtedly the most finished orator in the House. . . . He has the peculiar power of impressing an audience, which can only be accounted for by attributing to those who possess it some magnetic influence not common to everyone."

The methods of the government in the previous election gave him an opportunity of displaying facetiousness and extracting roars of laughter from all sides of the chamber. Cayley, the inspector-general, had unsuccessfully contested a seat in the counties of Huron and Bruce. One of his electioneering devices had been that of presenting several Orange lodges of these counties with beautifully bound copies of the sacred scriptures. "It was a spectacle," remarked McGee, "rare and refreshing to see the inspector-general, the chancellor of the exchequer, the finance minister of the province, voluntarily turn missionary and act the part of a colporteur in the neighbourhood of Lake Huron. He must further remark that the good people of these counties seemed to have studied the sacred volume presented to them from so high a source to good effect. They appeared to have learnt the lesson of retributive justice, for although they accepted the gospel, they rejected the missionary."

There is something in parliamentary life that appeals to the fighting instinct, and men

in opposition feel more free to indulge in it. McGee did so with undisguised recklessness. In the opinion of sober-minded people he seemed over-ready to engage in the battles of debate. One of the most controversial questions of the period was the choice of a site for the government. Up to 1858 the capital had been shunted about almost in the manner of a freight car, remaining at the most only four years in any one city. Such an arrangement was obviously not satisfactory. Yet there was real difficulty in deciding which of the rival cities should be the permanent capital. Quebec, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton—all had their advocates who fought for their respective centres with the public enthusiasm of men whose parliamentary seats depended upon the extent to which they promoted local interests. A decision in favour of any one city might spell the death of the ministry. The Macdonald-Cartier government of 1858, unwilling to enter an early grave, hit upon an expedient which might remove responsibility from their heads. They passed a resolution requesting the

Queen to choose among the rival cities. The Queen or her ministers could have little knowledge of the respective merits of the various Canadian cities, and it is likely that she acted on advice from Canada. In any case she decided in favour of a village, Bytown, in the backwoods of the Ottawa river. From a ragged settlement, in the country of lumbermen, the village has since grown into the beautiful Ottawa. The Opposition was up in arms against the Queen's decision. McGee, who was frankly a champion of Montreal, flung himself into the debate, pleading the advantages of Lower Canada's largest city.

The final upshot was the resignation of the government, and the calling of Brown and Dorion to form a ministry. Then occurred the famous incident in Canadian history known as the Double Shuffle. The governor, Sir Edmund Head, refused Brown the privilege of a dissolution whereby the Reform leader might have obtained a more substantial majority. To add to the latter's misfortunes, the Opposition without giving the Reform

ministry a trial carried a vote of censure. The new ministry, only a few hours old, was thus forced out of power, and Cartier and Macdonald were once more called upon. Constitutional precedent required that the ministers upon accepting office should seek re-election. But Macdonald feared that the ministers from Upper Canada would not be returned, if at this juncture they faced their constituents. Hence the ministers by shuffling their offices made use of a legal technicality to avoid re-election, and carried on the government as if nothing had occurred to disturb their former possession of power.

Bitter were the complaints of the Opposition against such juggling. McGee's voice joined the chorus of denunciation. He slashed the Cartier-Macdonald group for pushing difficulties in the path of the Brown government, and even accused the governor of an unseemly partiality for Macdonald. His heavy-fisted criticisms aroused intense resentment in the government ranks, and every effort was made to discredit him. The press was wheeled into the sordid task of endeavour-

ing to damage his reputation and ruin his public life. The Toronto *Leader* and the *Catholic Witness* of Montreal were truceless in their attacks. Much was made out of the fact that he had been a fugitive rebel, and the hostile Catholic press endeavoured to prove that his orthodoxy was in question. Even an effort was made to get the board of Catholic bishops to condemn him publicly. Innuendoes were thrown out that he had some association with a revolutionary society which threatened the overthrow of Canadian institutions. John A. Macdonald was led to describe him as a rebel in his own country, who had come to Canada to propagate rebellion. Indeed, the party of Macdonald and Cartier procured a complete file of McGee's New York *Nation*, in order that they might be able to taunt him with the revolutionary and anti-British sentiments which he had expressed between the years 1848 and 1850.

If he had been a man of ordinary ability and troubled with super-sensitiveness, McGee would not have survived this ordeal of his first parliamentary year. But ten years of

American journalism had hardened him sufficiently to go buoyantly and successfully through the disagreeable rough-and-tumble of Canadian politics. His rebel antecedents did not encumber him. He boldly defended his revolutionary career in Ireland on the ground that he had rebelled against conditions which did not exist in Canada, and against which any Canadian would have rebelled. As to his position in his new home, he was emphatic in his profession of faith: "I am as loyal to the institutions under which I live in Canada as any Tory of the old or new schools."

Throughout this period he was not always on the side of Brown and the Opposition stalwarts. On the important question of the tariff he voted with the government. In 1858 Cayley had introduced a budget with additions to existing duties. He was bending to the drift of opinion in favour of protection for the juvenile industries of Canada, and was also in search of increased revenue. Galt, who became finance minister in 1858, was influenced by similar considerations. He imposed duties of 20% and 25% on manufac-

tured goods, with the aim of seeking more public revenue and incidentally providing protection to Canadian manufacturers. To George Brown and his followers who had absorbed the free trade doctrines of British liberalism Galt's protective principles were heresy. Brown's organ, the *Toronto Globe*, thundered against them as pernicious. But McGee, a frank protectionist, championed them as necessary for the development of industrial as well as agrarian activity. "Where there were no producing cities as well as consuming cities, there had been no prosperity—the urban and the rural population must bear some adequate proportion to each other before security and safety could be established." This creed was similar to that preached in the same period by Horace Greeley in the republic to the south. It has continued since to have an influence on Canadian and American statesmen.

In the four years that McGee sat on the opposition benches, the gravest question facing the United Canadas was the fate of the union. Largely on the recommendation of

Lord Durham and Lord Sydenham, the two provinces had been united in 1841. But, contrary to Durham's intention, little attempt had been made to merge into one the two peoples, the French of the lower province and the British of the upper. Complete fusion was perhaps impossible. In any case it had been made difficult by the provision of the Union Act that equal representation should be conceded to each province. The two sections of the country thus being recognized as distinct units, the members of the legislature, as representatives of one or the other unit, contended for sectional advantages. At the outset the population of Lower Canada had been larger by 150,000, but in the passage of a few years the situation was reversed. The Upper Canadian members now became sensitive that their province was not receiving benefits commensurate with their numbers. In George Brown they had an eloquent and fearless advocate. In his opinion, the union was a complete failure because it did not succeed in creating a united people. In addition he considered that it

upheld an injustice, for it allowed one community to govern another more numerous. His case was stated emphatically in the *Globe*. "It must be obvious to every intelligent man that to accomplish the great ends contemplated by the union, and to draw closer the bonds of sympathy uniting the people of Canada—it is imperatively necessary that legislation wherever practicable, shall be for the whole province and not sectional, and that the local institutions of Upper and Lower Canada shall be gradually assimilated. With two languages—two law codes—two judicial systems—two systems of national instruction—two systems of municipal government—two systems of land tenure—two systems of title registration—two systems of mercantile partnership and right of kin—two systems of relief to solvents—two systems of raising money for local purposes—two systems in everything—how can we hope to create a united people?"

Brown's solution was the concession of representation by population. Through the recognition of this principle the various differences between the two portions of the

province would be sponged out by the action of the majority in the legislature. In addition it would redress the injustice suffered by Upper Canada. That province in Brown's estimate had an excess population over Lower Canada of 225,000, and this excess, according to the Reformers, was virtually unrepresented. In plain terms majority rule in the Canadas was impossible and majority interests suffered. Brown raised the principle of representation by population into a slogan cry, and no Highland chief could have been more effective in stirring his impassioned followers. The French were as relentless in their resistance. They rightly feared that representation by population would bring a majority of English into the chamber, and their most cherished interests would be imperilled. Yet Brown, like a representative of Fate, in season and out of season drove home his arguments, and made an ominous deadlock in the legislature. In 1858, when McGee entered the chamber, the majority of French under Cartier, leagued with a minority of British from Upper Canada under Macdonald,

were like a threatening army opposed to the followers of Brown, who constituted a majority of the Upper Canadians. The feverish intensity of Canadian politics at the time was the consequence of this strained battle to decide whether the union was to fall under the weight of Brown's attack. One side added as much bitterness to the struggle as the other. On one occasion Cartier stirred up great irritation by expressing the opinion that the excess population of Upper Canada had no more right of representation than the numerous codfish in Gaspé Bay.

What was McGee's position? He was in the ranks of the Opposition, but his views on the momentous question of the time did not entirely square with those of Brown and the Upper Canadian Reformers. He admitted the justice of the claim that numbers should be the basis of representation. "Property should have its weight, intelligence should have its weight, but any man who, on this continent and in this age of the world, did not believe that numbers should be the basis, was as little to be reasoned with as a man who

believed in the philosopher's stone." Yet he did not think that a change in the basis of representation would constitute a permanent solution of the difficulties of Canadian government. In October, 1859, he, Dorion, and two other members of the Lower Canadian opposition, L. T. Drummond and L. A. Dessaulles, explored carefully the constitutional problem, and drew up an able report, which has considerable significance in the light of later events. They examined in turn the various suggestions made to relieve the constitutional conflict: repeal of the union, representation by population, the double majority. Repeal of the union was practically impossible. The provinces had so many things in common as to make it imperative that they remain under the same roof. Representation by population, they summarily rejected on the ground that it would still leave room for bitter conflict between the representatives of the respective provinces over the justice of particular legislation. They similarly rejected the double majority, whereby no measure should be considered as carried until it had not merely

a majority of the legislature as a whole, but also a majority of members from the section of the country which it affected. They considered that the double majority would give rise to confusions, not least of which would be the difficulty of distinguishing between the cases where it should and should not apply. Moreover, the remedy would be worse than the disease, because it would leave in the chamber two majorities and two minorities.

The true statesmanlike solution in their estimation would be the substitution of a purely federal for the existing legislative union. The federal government should have powers defined to such subjects as were common to the two provinces, leaving supreme jurisdiction in all other matters to the provincial legislatures. The committee even went into some of the details of their suggested system, making it clear throughout that the pervading idea of the new constitution should be the delegation of powers from the province to the federal government. Everything relating to local affairs, such as education, administration of justice, and militia should be under provincial jurisdiction.

This document is symptomatic of McGee's thought. In the *New Era*, he had painted the vision of a united British North America, but he had not, while a journalist, come to close grips with a scheme of union. His year of parliamentary experiences had brought him nearer to constitutional needs, and his co-operation with Dorion in the projection of a definite plan was the result. Although he later departed from the details of this programme, to the principle of federation he remained faithful. Such was not the case with Dorion. It was the irony of his career that the confederation scheme of 1864, under which Canada grew into lusty young nationhood, found in him its severest critic. In the years following 1859 McGee continued as zealously as before to plead in parliament and on public platforms the cause of federal union. He looked even far beyond the mere federation of the two Canadas. With an extended foresight he advocated a union of all the colonies. In 1860, in the debates on Brown's resolutions, favouring a federal union of the two provinces—to which Brown had

now turned—McGee argued that much more desirable would be a union of all the North American provinces. Common interests demanded it. The existing arrangement with its tariff barriers between the colonies hampered trade and economic development. Union would widen intercolonial markets and stimulate the entire material progress of the colonies, while without union they must lag far behind the United States in the working of their natural resources. But federation was imperative for another reason. It was a necessary means of attaining for the colonies a national existence. McGee fervidly looked forward to a day, not distant, “when we should be known not as Upper or Lower Canadians, Nova Scotians, or New Brunswickers, but as members of a nation designated as the Six United Provinces.” The establishment of a federal state for the nurturing of a British North American nationality was the shining goal that he held before Canadians. The wider union would not merely solve the political difficulties of the Canadas, but would insure the great destiny of all the colonies.

Canadians of the present take casually the fact that their country straddles a continent. They assume that the eastern settlements expanded through the pressure of population into the prairie country and beyond; that the spread of Canada westward was as inevitable as the growth of a sapling into an oak, that nothing else could happen but what did happen. Their assumption leaves out of consideration the effulgent political idealism that entered into the creation of their country. It was through the daring spirit of individual men and their faith in Canada's future that the Dominion was fashioned. The winning of the West was not the product of mass action, like the swarming of bees taking possession of a new hive. The majority of eastern colonists in the sixties knew nothing of the West, and were content to remain uninformed on the subject. A Nova Scotian of the period would have shaken his head in disbelief had he been told by a passing stranger that, in little more than fifty years, a city on the far-away Red River would possess one of the world's largest

wheat exchanges, and that winding freight trains would draw the grain eastward on its way to the markets of Europe. The economic potentialities of the land beyond Lake Superior were a closed book to the average man. The school children knew of it only as the land where the Indian still hung his scalps in his wigwam, and hunted the buffalo. Adults read slender references to it in the newspapers with the mild interest with which their descendants scan the descriptions of Arctic territories discovered by a Stefansson. Had the acquisition of the West depended on popular agitation and action, it would not have become Canadian, and very likely would have become part of the American republic. It was won by the vision and faith of a few men, prominent among whom was McGee.

He had abundant reasons for western expansion. Conspicuous among them was the desire to open up the unexploited prairie lands, where the indigent members of society in the East might, through their own effort, find a competence. For the same reason he had been an ardent champion of western

settlement while residing in the United States. A more imaginative consideration was that the Canadian territory might constitute a pathway to the great East, and that thereby the hopes of early explorers in a north-west passage from Europe to Asia might be realized. "We cannot despair," he declared in a speech in 1860, "that the dream of Jacques Cartier may yet be fulfilled, and the shortest route from Europe to China be found through the valley of the St. Lawrence." Some twenty-five years later, the steel lines of the Canadian Pacific Railway made McGee's dream come true.

Above all, he looked to the acquirement of the West as a subsidiary means of bringing to birth a new northern nation. From the outset his imagination had been fired by this conception. There was no better stage on which the experiment of nation-building could be attempted than the vast territory stretching westward to the Pacific. The pioneer settlers through a persistent faith and courage cleared the woods for their seed, and fashioned the farms of the future. A like

courage on the part of Canadian statesmen would lay in the north-west territories the foundation of a new nation. Union of the colonies, followed by expansion, was the necessary element in the glorious vision which McGee pictured to an electrified legislature in the session of 1860: "I look to the future of my adopted country with hope, though not without anxiety; I see in the not remote distance, one great nationality bound, like the shield of Achilles, by the blue rim of ocean—I see it quartered into many communities—each disposing of its internal affairs—but all bound together by free institutions, free intercourse, and free commerce; I see within the round of that shield, the peaks of the western mountains and the crests of the eastern waves—the winding Assiniboine, the five-fold lakes, the St. Lawrence, the Ottawa, the Saguenay, the St. John, and the Basin of Mines—by all these flowing waters, in all the valleys they fertilize, in all the cities they visit in their courses, I see a generation of industrious, contented, moral men, free in name and in fact—men capable of maintain-

ing, in peace and in war, a constitution worthy of such a country."

Early in 1861, an event occurred which added force to McGee's advocacy of British-American union. In the gloom of an April morning, the guns of the confederate troops outside Fort Sumter boomed their first discharge, and the American civil war began. During the next five years a titanic struggle was waged in the republic. The issues and nature of this war might seem of little interest to the British colonists. They were sufficiently remote from the stage of conflict. Yet few events in the century so quickened and shaped development in the British communities as this. McGee was quick to see its implications. "That shot fired at Fort Sumter, on the 12th of April, 1861, had a message for the north as well as for the south.... That shot fired at Fort Sumter was the signal gun of a new epoch for North America, which told the people of Canada, more plainly than human speech can express it, to sleep no more except on their arms." The civil war made the northern states a military power,

and whatever turn the struggle might take the British colonies were in danger from aggressive action. If the federal government failed to conquer the South, it might, as some politicians urged, obtain compensation by absorbing the British possessions. Even in case of victory the spirit of military aggression might so control northern statesmen as to lead to the conquest of Canada.

From the beginning of the war a very active newspaper campaign had been going on against Canada, led by the *New York Herald*, a paper which represented the opinions of Seward, Secretary of State. Significantly also it had the largest circulation of any journal in the United States. It declared emphatically that Canada geographically was an annex to the Republic, and that, if an army were sent there, its inhabitants would at once declare their independence of Britain. After the *Trent* affair of 1861, when two southern gentlemen were removed from the British steamer *Trent* by federal sailors, these annexationist opinions found more heated expression. McGee, who kept in close

touch with American opinion, became acutely aware of Canada's danger. On every available occasion, he publicly pleaded that preparation be made for defence and the most essential preparation was colonial union. The situation demonstrated Æsop's fable of the sticks. In a bundle they were unbreakable, but asunder they could be snapped with ease. He was convinced that the colonies had reached the cross-roads of their destiny. The pressure of events across their frontiers and their own political development brought them face to face with a number of alternatives, one of which must be chosen. They must either (1) strengthen themselves as members of the Empire by union amongst themselves; (2) become independent states and face the perils of such a situation; or (3) agree to be absorbed in the United States and lose their individuality as British-American communities.

McGee argued that the time was ripe for the first alternative. "The eventful opportunity for British America is now; the tide in our affairs is at the flood." Union would satisfy the most extended aspiration of the

colonists, for through it they could march out of their petty colonial existence to the status of a nation, "in perpetual alliance with the Empire, under which it had its rise and growth." At the same time, he was emphatic in his description of the kind of nation to be nurtured. "A Canadian nationality, not French-Canadian, nor British-Canadian, nor Irish-Canadian—patriotism rejects the prefix—that is, in my opinion, what we should look forward to,—that is what we ought to labour for, that is what we ought to be prepared to defend to the death."

Such was the compelling cause which McGee as a member of the Opposition championed in parliament and on public platforms. In the *New Era*, he had sketched it in outline. Now as a political leader he carefully shaded in the outlines, and presented a compact case. The enthusiasm which as a Young Irelander he had bestowed on the ideal of Irish freedom, he now devoted to the service of this new cause. Others had caught a similar vision. Alexander Morris, an Upper Canadian, in March, 1858, delivered a lecture in

Montreal entitled *Nova Britannia*, describing the potential resources of the British colonies and projecting the plan of a future union which would make those colonies a great nation. A few public men of the period spoke frequently of the national future of the colonies, but upon the mind of none had the idea fastened so firmly as upon McGee's. Not merely did he vividly grasp the ideal, he voiced it with impelling beauty of speech. In him the Canadian nation had its first prophet.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN OFFICE AND OUT OF IT

ON May 22, 1862, the Cartier-Macdonald government fell. Its career came to grief on a militia bill which provided for the maintenance of a force of 50,000 men, at all times available for active service, at a cost of about one million dollars. The danger to the provinces consequent upon the events of war in the United States had forced the government to stake its existence upon such a far-reaching scheme of defence. But the defection of some Lower Canadian supporters threw out the measure, and the government resigned. Foley, the Reform leader, was passed over, and the governor called upon Sandfield Macdonald to form an administration. In co-operation with Sicotte, the Reform leader in Lower Canada, he patched together a ministry which held office for approximately one year, and was known as the Macdonald-Sicotte government. It contained the leading

figures of the Opposition: James Morris, A. A. Dorion, M. H. Foley, W. McDougall, W. P. Howland, and McGee. The presidency of the council was conferred on McGee.

The programme of the new administration had in it a dash of boldness. It included militia and bankruptcy bills, plans towards opening for settlement the great north-western territories, and the determination to set the building of the intercolonial railway on the move. Many of these measures McGee gladly welcomed as steps towards the establishment of that for which he laboured, the great new northern nation. But that stern reformer, George Brown, found one grave omission in this scheme of legislation. Sandfield Macdonald flatly refused to carry into effect the principle so sacred to the editor of the *Globe*, representation by population. He was personally doubtful of its value as a medicine for Canadian ills, and he felt that the line of least difficulty would be to leave it alone. In its place he adopted as the hinge principle of the government's action, the double majority, begging that it

be given a fair trial. But Brown was not satisfied. In his mind the Reform party existed primarily to establish representation by population. A ministry that failed to accomplish this was no reform government. "Better a thousand times," thundered the *Globe*, "had it been that the Cartier-Macdonald government with all its wickedness should have been recalled than that so many leading men of the Liberal Opposition should have sacrificed their principles and destroyed the moral influence which they justly possessed with the electors of Upper Canada." Such hostility was unveiled, although Brown alleged that he was willing to give the government a chance. His lack of friendliness was ominous, and the fall of the ministry a year later was largely due to the fact that George Brown had failed to give it his blessing.

What was the attitude of McGee? He slipped into office with the determination to perform something for the cause which he had advanced by voice and pen, the development of a British-American nationality. Varied elements entered the task of nation-

building. More was necessary than the territorial union of the colonies, although that was imperative. In a sparse community, flattened out over a new and vast country, an impelling need was the encouragement of immigration. The body of a nation was in its sturdy farmers and dauntless pioneers. Men were required to labour in field and mine. The Canadas from the eastern to the western frontier had thousands of acres of rich farming lands awaiting the plough. The wealth of the fisheries and mineral resources were no less great, and all these invited labour. This fact McGee keenly realized, and to the task of colonization he bent his attention. In his election speech at Montreal in June, 1862, he declared that in the ministry "all that he would ask to be judged by was this—what had he done for the settlement of the country? This was his great political principle, all others in his estimation being secondary." Canadian statesmanship, he believed, must be tested by the success with which it endeavoured to build a great community out of a small one. Careful settlement was the

readiest means to this end. In the past three years McGee had done much to promote an interest in settlement. In each of the previous sessions he had obtained a committee to examine the problem of immigration. The committee of 1860 submitted a careful report with many recommendations. It drew attention to the fact that the advantages of Canada as a field of colonization had not been brought home to the popular mind of Europe. During the season of 1859 there arrived in the country by the St. Lawrence, not more than 6,000 English-speaking persons. In the same year New York received 45,000. There were many obvious reasons for this disparity. The development of industrial life in the United States gave the inducement of higher wages. Canada, being almost purely an agricultural country, could not offer the same wages, and incidentally the committee recommended that manufactures be encouraged to widen the appeal to prospective immigrants. But McGee and his committee emphasized in particular the need of spreading information concerning Canada's strongest

attraction to the European emigrant, cheap or free cultivable land. They pressed the necessity of an intimate co-operation between the immigrant service and the Crown lands department in order that immigrant authorities be kept cognizant with all the lands available. The lack of such co-operation in the past had seriously handicapped the settlement of the country.

The committee also laid importance upon the building of a suitable landing place for immigrants with convenient sheds and wash houses in the port of Quebec on the general plan of the establishment at Castle Garden, New York. A further recommendation, carried into effect, was that resident provincial agents be appointed at convenient places in Europe, such as Christiania, Hamburg, Liverpool, an Irish port, and also New York. At such strategic points information and guidance might be given to prospective emigrants, and their faces directed to the Canadas. The report of 1861 backed up these recommendations with others of a similar kind. In the spring of 1862, before assuming office, McGee

again brought the question of colonization before parliament and "in the spirit of a broad, uncircumscribed Canadian patriotism, which knows in this House, in any legislative light, neither race, nor religion, nor language, but only Canada, and her advancement," moved for another committee. The committee was appointed, but in this year it lacked McGee's enthusiastic chairmanship. His ministerial duties kept him otherwise occupied.

When the ministry was being formed, he had hoped to get the Department of Agriculture, which included immigration, the subject in which he had most interest. Political considerations thwarted this hope, but on being given the presidency of the council he was promised that the immigration bureau should come under his department. The promise was not fulfilled, largely because of the opposition of Lower Canada. The French-Canadian members feared that a vigorous immigration policy would, through the inrush of immigrants, swamp the French-Canadian community with English-speaking people.

*L'Ordre*, a leading French Catholic organ in Montreal, stated that "McGee's avowed liberality, which looked upon all nations and creeds alike, would fit him for minister of immigration for Upper Canada, but totally disqualify him for that office in Lower Canada." Such agitation was successful. It restrained Sandfield Macdonald from granting McGee control over the immigration service. It did more. Much to McGee's annoyance, it checked the government of which he was a member from doing anything to carry into effect the recommendations which his committees had suggested. Even the emigration agents in England and Ireland were withdrawn, and new ones not appointed. No event of the period gave McGee such chagrin. It seemed to him that the ministers were juggling with the most vital subject affecting the country's growth.

A work no less significant than immigration in the creation of a "new northern nation" was railway construction, and in its advocacy McGee was quite as ardent. Nature had endowed the British colonies of North America

with a magnificent road system. In the seventeenth century the French settlements in Canada had clustered round the St. Lawrence and Richelieu rivers, and these winding watercourses constituted the one bond of communication. The United Empire Loyalists later erected their log houses along the wooded shores of the lakes and rivers further west, and the St. Lawrence waterway was their means of contact with Quebec and Britain. Without the St. Lawrence the Canadas would have broken in two like a bridge without piers. But one gift Nature failed to bestow on the British colonies. She provided no easy means of transit between the Canadian and Maritime provinces. Mountain spurs with dense forests constituted an almost impenetrable wall, blocking overland travel between the two groups of British colonies. The sea-route through the Gulf was tediously long, and was closed by ice part of the year. It was clear, as Lord Durham in 1838 had recognized with quick insight, that political association between the colonies must await the building of a

railway cutting through the mountain and forest area and bringing Quebec closer to Halifax. In the years following Durham, the aspiration for such a line grew among the more far-sighted of colonial statesmen. It was considered as a necessary basis not merely for colonial union, but for colonial prosperity. The Maritime provinces were in need of it to reap the benefits of trade with the Canadian and American west, and to forge a commercial route which would make their harbours the winter ports of the northern part of the continent. The Canadas no less required it in order that they might have access to the Atlantic frontage of British North America, and find consumers for their produce amongst the seamen of the lower provinces.

The attempts to build an intercolonial line have a lengthy and chequered history. In 1850 Joseph Howe, Nova Scotia's distinguished champion of responsible government, obtained an imperial guarantee to support the colonies in financing the project, but the plan collapsed on account of

irreconcilable opinions as to what route the line should take. In the following years negotiations continued, but a dismal succession of circumstances made them sterile. What the provincial governments failed to perform, private enterprise in part attempted. The Grand Trunk Company took the field, and pushed its lines west and east. But the vision of a truly intercolonial line was not lost. The need of it, to relieve Canada's dependence on American ports, increased in urgency. In 1857 the Canadian government, co-operating with Nova Scotia, again pressed the question on the attention of the imperial authorities, but without results. Nothing daunted, the Macdonald-Sicotte government resumed the project, and McGee was its warmest advocate. To him the railway was an instrument of creative statesmanship. "The construction of the intercolonial railway would have the effect of inducing a union of the colonies and making them one in interest and importance, whereas now they were but isolated, lone, undistinguished provinces."

In the Quebec conference of 1862, the first of the important colonial conferences,

he drew up in company with Howe of Nova Scotia and Tilley of New Brunswick a memorandum concerning its construction and management. It was agreed that "if it should be concluded that the work shall be constructed and managed by a joint commission of the three provinces, it shall be constructed in the proportion of two appointed by the government of Canada, and one each by the governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the four to select a fifth before entering upon the discharge of their duties." It was also planned that Canada should assume five-twelfths of the risk of construction, the provinces by the sea dividing up the other seven-twelfths between them. Intercolonial free-trade was to follow at once on the making of the railway. But the scheme, like its predecessors, came to grief. For its adoption, the financial backing of the imperial government was imperative, and to obtain it Sicotte and Howland went to England. But British ministers would give a financial guarantee only on such conditions as would render it in the opinion of Sicotte of no advantage to

the colonial governments concerned, and the Canadians returned empty-handed. The possibility of sinking money in the inter-colonial also led to disagreement within the government party. In hostility to the project Dorion in January, 1863, left the ministry. This confluence of adverse circumstances forced the administration to discard its intention of carrying through the much desired intercolonial line, much to McGee's regret. Little more was gained than the extension of the survey which proved useful in subsequent years. The most important step attempted by the ministry in hastening the emergence of the new nationality was thus halted.

A thorny issue which had much to do with the fate of the Macdonald-Sicotte ministry was that of separate schools. Early in the history of the Canadas a common school system had arisen which recognized no religious distinctions among those seeking education. The money of all taxpayers went to the maintenance of the system. But, in 1841, an Act allowed public support to

denominational schools, and to such institutions Roman Catholic parents sent their children. The separate school principle was developed by later Acts in 1843, 1852, and 1855. Yet many Roman Catholics considered that the status given to their schools was inadequate. In 1860, 1861, and 1862, R. W. Scott of Ottawa introduced legislation to strengthen the Roman Catholic separate school system of Upper Canada. On each occasion he found a warm supporter in McGee. Indeed, in his first election address, in 1857, McGee had chosen this subject for his special championship. It was the one large issue on which he differed radically from Brown, and he was ever frank that in it he would not compromise. He made clear his views. "If you permit the state to form the minds of the young apart from parental or religious control, why not allow the same state to establish a uniformity of belief and worship for the old. The same pretension which justifies the state school will justify a state church." For youth the moral guidance received under the impress of religious

teaching was invaluable. "In Scotland, Switzerland, Holland, do they launch men upon the voyage of life without a strong infusion of dogmatic religion—without a standard of right and wrong—without an ethical compass by which they may tell the moral north from the moral south?" The logical corollary from which he did not shrink was that all sects should have their separate schools. The followers of Brown viewed such a doctrine with dismay. To them the common school was the least expensive and the most likely to alloy sectarian feeling. The *Globe* lucidly stated their case. "We need the common school system more than New England to blend into one homogeneous people all these races of men. Carry out Mr. McGee's ideas, and we shall never accomplish that. We shall be a nation of sects fighting for supremacy; a people backward, unintelligent, unenterprising."

Notwithstanding the hostility of Upper Canadians to the principle of separate schools, Scott's bill, in 1863, became law. Due largely to McGee's influence, it was carried

as a government measure. This was fatal to the ministry. Although Scott's Act affected only Upper Canada, it was carried against the heated opposition of a majority from that province. The principle of the double majority, to which Sandfield Macdonald had pinned his colours, was flagrantly ignored, and Brown with his followers had an ample opportunity to sing condemnations. The government's action was a confession that its much proclaimed principle could not always be applied, and that, as a solvent of political difficulties, it was useless.

The Macdonald-Sicotte government never survived this shock to its pretensions. In May, 1863, J. A. Macdonald moved and Cartier seconded a motion condemning the ministry, and it was carried by a majority of five. "We shall not," declared the *Globe*, "cry our eyes out over the defeat of the ministry, whatever the result be.... If it is destroyed now by its enemies, we may rejoice that the executioner's task has been taken out of our hands." But the administration did not immediately die. Sandfield Mac-

donald endeavoured to save it by a purgation, and the infusion of fresh blood. A reorganization of the cabinet took place, with the obvious aim of making it more acceptable to Brown and Upper Canada. Sicotte was quietly dropped, and Dorion took his place as leader of the Lower Canadians and partner with Macdonald. McGee, Foley, and Abbott were gently pushed out. McGee was removed to make way for a person more favourable in the eyes of Upper Canada, but many of the prime minister's supporters considered his removal a serious mistake. The *Globe*, which blessed the ministerial changes, considered that McGee had not obtained a fair deal. To himself, the event was one of the most painful in his public career. Of all men he was least covetous for office as subsequent events proved, but he craved the confidence of those with whom he acted. Sandfield Macdonald withheld such confidence, and never adequately explained to him why he was being removed from the ministry. The cards were shuffled behind his back. In any case the affair was momentous, for it jostled

him from the ranks of the Reformers and henceforth he tended to direct his support to J. A. Macdonald and Cartier.

In the early summer of 1863 the new Macdonald-Dorion government appealed to the country. Lacking robust strength, its members laid no very great emphasis upon the principles for which they stood. But one significant pronouncement was ventured to the effect that the ministry would consider representation by population as an open question. This alone was sufficient to win Brown who promised to wield his lance for the new government. The election gave Sandfield Macdonald a majority in Upper Canada, but in the lower province his followers were thinned to a minority. In Montreal three of the ministers went down to defeat, Young, Holton, and Dorion. This fact the *Globe* attributed to the dropping of McGee. The elections altered only slightly the political situation. The government had not increased its voting strength, and it therefore lacked the vitality to carry through vigorous legislation. The evil of political deadlock remained

like a running sore. Thoughtful men still shook their heads at a hopeless situation, and those with vision looked forward with more earnestness than ever to some great constructive measure that would bring salvation to Canadian politics.

McGee made his departure from the ranks of reformers the occasion of a dramatic utterance in the press. In June 1863 he wrote a public letter to a friend, Daniel Macarow, of Kingston, proclaiming his devotion to those principles cherished by Conservatives and expressing his fear of democracy. He believed that the surest antidote to the instability and rashheadedness associated with democratic government would be the establishment of a royal prince, and the nurturing in Canada as in England of the monarchical principle. He was confident that a monarchy would save colonial society from the excesses that seemed to be the natural irruptions of democratic communities. In the light of subsequent development, there is something a little bizarre about McGee's suggestion that a monarch be imported to the British colonies.

But in the sixties it was not as chimerical as might now appear. The political future of the colonies was then obscure. Popular institutions worked in such a manner as to inspire despair in the minds of the critical. Partisan spirit was violent in its bitterness. Political morality, seldom very high on the American continent, was at a low ebb. The restless spirit of self-interest, a powerful agent in promoting the development of a new country, expressed itself in actions predatory to the community. The outbreak of the American civil war seemed to rock institutions throughout the continent, and accentuate the sense of insecurity. It was natural that McGee should look abroad for some means of bringing stability to Canadian institutions, and he was merely following a time-worn precedent in believing that a monarchy was a stabilizing force. All the prominent fathers of Confederation held a similar opinion, although McGee stood alone in his plea that the monarch should definitely live within Canada. His letter had no very practical results. It was little more than a gesture,

transitory in its effects, but sufficiently significant at the time to arouse controversy.

For some ten months the Macdonald-Dorion government stumbled along under accumulating difficulties. Without a substantial majority it could venture on no bold legislation, and its efforts were mainly concerned with staving off defeat. McGee attacked it with as much fire as any member of the Opposition. He was merciless in his treatment of Sandfield Macdonald. The premier on one occasion taunted him with his rebel past, and McGee replied with a polished sarcasm that held the house spellbound. "Although there may have been imprudence and many errors in the early career of one who was an editor at seventeen, and a public speaker before I was of age, and although there have been many things that my own judgment at this day does not approve, at all events, throughout the whole long road, and it remains for the most part in irrevocable type, the honourable member will find no art of duplicity, he will find no instance in which I betrayed a friend or intrigued against

an associate. I have not been fair to men's faces and false behind their back. I have not condoned with sinister sympathy with the friends of a public man whom I desired to injure, while at the same time I placed in the hands of his enemies weapons of attack, forged by malice, and poisoned by slanderous personalities." The words do little to recapture the intense atmosphere of the chamber, the young man with pale face and flashing eyes, and the piercing soprano voice which carried the barbed phrases to every listening ear. An observer, E. R. Cameron, wrote that "the members upon the floor, and the spectators in the galleries, were....almost breathless during the delivery, and the merciless flogging of the Premier excited the same feelings as would be aroused in a gladiatorial combat, in which one party, by the most exquisite thrusts, is done slowly to death." Notwithstanding the criticisms of McGee and others, the government staggered on until, like a spent runner, it resigned in March, 1864. Another *impasse* was reached.

After the usual political manœuvres Sir Etienne Taché, with the assistance of

J. A. Macdonald, put together a new ministry in which the chief members were Taché, Macdonald, Cartier, Galt, Foley, and McGee. McGee became minister of agriculture, an office in which his chief interest rested, in virtue of its intimate contact with the work of nation-building through colonization. The ministry had the same jagged path to follow as its predecessors. With a slender majority, it worked under the shadow of defeat. It could obviously venture on no bold policies, and it was forced to shrink from clear-cut issues. Eventually, on June 14, it fell, the fourth ministry within four years. The situation had become baffling beyond description. It mattered not in what manner the political groups paired and allied, deadlock continued, like an evil spirit, to stalk the career of each administration. Political ingenuity exhausted itself without avail. Appeals to the electorate brought no wholesome results. The continuance of party conflict merely accentuated the difficulties. Where was the solution? The solution indeed had long been advocated by McGee and others. But it was now

pressed forward by a stronger force than advocacy, by the intense gravity of the political situation. George Brown, with an honesty of purpose that should make his name for ever remembered among Canadians, came forward to declare that the time had come for establishing a new system by a union of all parties. His demand constitutes the real beginning of the federal movement consummated three years later.

Early in October, 1863, Brown and McGee had consulted over the difficulties of the existing constitution, and Brown was disposed to approve of a federal union of the Canadas. McGee promised his support to any motion which Brown might introduce on the subject. Hence on October 12, Brown introduced a famous resolution asking for the appointment of a committee to report on the constitutional difficulties with the purpose of finding a way out. The motion was temporarily withdrawn, but was re-introduced on March 14. Weeks again elapsed without anything being done, and throughout this period Brown's motion

encountered the stern opposition of Cartier and Macdonald, while McGee was its warm champion, seeing in it the possibility of getting a federal system on the anvil. The committee was finally appointed, McGee and Brown being its two most prominent members. On June 13, the day previous to the fall of the Taché government, it reported in favour of a federation. The fall of the administration precipitated events. Brown's suggestion was now gladly accepted, and the formation of a coalition for the carrying of constitutional changes was agreed upon.

Difficulties strewed the path of forming a coalition. Men who had assailed one another with the bitterness of fishmongers could combine only with diffidence. Moreover, feeling in the country was lethargic. Yet, by the close of June, the administration was formed. The Reformers, Messrs. George Brown, Oliver Mowat, and William McDougall were sworn in as ministers, and eagerly looked forward to their task. Their procedure was shaped for them by events which matured quickly in the Maritime

provinces. The need for union among the colonies by the sea had become so imperative that their leaders determined on holding a convention at Charlottetown on September 1, for the purpose of fashioning a federal scheme. Fate in her kindest mood could not have given a better opportunity to Canadian statesmen. Why should not the prospective union between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island include the Canadas? The dream of a united British North America, which had long dazzled the imagination of McGee and others, pushed itself to the fore. The plastic moment had come. Now was the time to shape the destiny of the British possessions. Fortunately men were in the Canadas ready to snatch opportunity by the forelock. Eight members of the ministry, including McGee, departed to Charlottetown to discuss federal union with the leaders of the lower provinces. They were successful in their mission. The statesmen of the Maritime colonies were convinced that the wider union was preferable, and to construct it they agreed to meet at Quebec in the early days of October.

In the months previous to the historic Charlottetown conference, McGee had championed his cherished cause, not merely in the legislature, but in the press and on the platform. The case for confederation had, in all the provinces, no greater publicity agent. In the *British American Magazine* for August and October, 1863, he eloquently pleaded that the British North American provinces should insure their future by immediate union. With the faith of Mrs. Browning that nations are what they will, he believed that all obstacles would dissolve before the determination of the colonists. "We are between the Gulf Stream and the Rocky Mountains—British subjects—professing monarchists almost to a man—four millions. Are these too few to form a decision on their political future? Our joint revenues within that range exceed those of the respectable kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, Bavaria, Portugal, and Saxony. Our joint civil lists far exceed the cost of the royal governments of those ancient and considerable nations, cramped as they are, where we are boundless

in point of territory. It is clear, then, that it is listlessness of will—not lack of means or numbers—which heretofore has prevented us taking up in a practical shape the alternative of the fate before us—the establishment of our future, complete, and permanent constitution.”

The reasons for immediate action were those he had adduced in previous years. There was the elemental need of defence. The colonies disunited could not defend themselves, nor could they be expected to fight for one another when they had nothing in common. They cherished British institutions, but these they could not long maintain without union. The force of American example was too great. Moreover, their economic development must inevitably lag behind that of the states to the south, unless they united to confer upon one another the benefits of reciprocal trade and mutual assistance. Of no less importance was the fact that only through confederation could the colonies shoulder the responsibilities which necessarily clung to them as communities with self-

government as an ideal. It was not merely in their own interests that they should do so, but in the interests of the mother state. "We have passed out of the stage of pupilage, and we have not emerged into the stage of partnership." The intermediary stage, in McGee's estimation, failed to develop an adequate sense of responsibility among the colonists, while it imposed on the imperial state the unfair burden of defence.

But mere reasons for union were not sufficient. The march of development depended upon another factor. A vital union of any kind presupposed a common sympathy and understanding, and these could be created only by intercourse. The colonists by the sea and those of the Canadas lived under similar institutions, and were of the same racial stock. But they had little intercourse; they were as divided as if they lived on different continents. The inhabitants of Nova Scotia looked upon Canadians with almost as much distrust as they would view the natives of the South Seas. Business relations might have done much to dissipate

this feeling, but the drift of trade from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick was southward. Halifax had more commerce with Boston than with Quebec, which lay away to the west, and was too distant for intimacy. McGee, who had travelled in all the colonies and felt as much at home at the friendly firesides of Halifax as in Montreal, pleaded continually for closer relationship. It was essential for that future nationality which he ever saw in the horizon. He expended energy and time to effect the closer contact. Each year since 1859, he had visited the Maritime provinces, pleading on every occasion for closer association. In the hot days of August, 1863, he was in Halifax and St. John, painting vivid pictures of the possibilities in colonial union, and championing the completion of the intercolonial railway as a means to union. "Your destiny and ours," he told the people of St. John, "is as inseparable as are the waters which pour into the Bay of Chaleur, rising though they do, on the one hand on the Canadian, and on the other on the New Brunswick Highlands.

Geographically we are bound up beyond the power of extinction."

In the mid-summer of 1864, he attempted something more than a personal tour. With Sandford Fleming, then chief engineer of the intercolonial survey, he planned an elaborate excursion of one hundred leading men from the Canadas. Members of parliament, the professions, and business men were represented. The boards of trade in St. John and Halifax welcomed the deputation, banquets were held, speeches delivered, and the Canadian representatives found through the fellowship of knife and fork how much they had in common with their fellow colonists of the lower provinces. McGee made use of the occasion to plead passionately for federation. The reporter of the *Canadien*, who accompanied the excursion, stated that at Fredericton McGee surpassed himself in his plea for united action. At Halifax, he declared that if the colonies "remained long as fragments, we shall be lost; but let us be united, and we shall be as a rock which, unmoved itself, flings back the waves that

may be dashed upon it by the storm." His eloquent campaigning, combined with the social intercourse provided by the excursion, undoubtedly did much to make successful the discussions at Charlottetown in the following September.

Throughout this period, he endeavoured to advance not merely those material readjustments, such as territorial union, necessary for the creation of a new nationality. With no less enthusiasm, he sought to cultivate sympathy and fellowship between all groups, sects, and parties—the essential basis for a nation. Dissension between the Roman Catholics and Protestants had long rent the Canadas, and McGee from the outset of his residence in Montreal had striven to heal it, frequently at the cost of friction with prominent men of his own church and race who feared that he was compromising their interests. In the period, Toronto was the chief hotbed of sectarian strife. The parades there on St. Patrick's Day had generally ended in rioting and sometimes in bloodshed. McGee poured oil on the troubled waters.

He persuaded the Catholic body to forego their parades, out of consideration for public harmony, and also induced them to cease printing a rather vituperative organ, known as the *Citizen*. In its place he substituted the *Freeman*, a journal, ably conducted, which championed McGee's policy of conciliation, and did much to bring about harmonious relationships between the Catholic and Protestant sects. With equal fervour he sought to break down the fatal inertia which lay like a mountain upon colonial leaders. In Halifax in 1863, he declared that "if we were ever to have a spirit of patriotism amongst us such as Englishmen manifest with respect to England, and Frenchmen to France, if we are to feel that we have a country, and that it is our country, we must obliterate all sectional lines, and overcome all party and local prejudices, and if in so doing difficulties present themselves, we must conquer them and assert our mastery over all obstacles." It was an admirable creed for those who looked to Confederation as the supreme goal for the colonies.

## CHAPTER V

### CONFEDERATION AND FENIANISM

ON the 10th of October, 1864, the historic Quebec conference met. It was a fitting time and a fitting place for the constructive work of colonial statesmen. October is the final harvest month of the Canadian year. The fruits and crops of the summer are garnered, and in no place does nature celebrate the event with more gorgeous colouring than in Quebec. Amid the magic charm and beauty of French Canada's old capital, the conference undertook the arduous labour of carrying into execution the visions of the previous years. McGee's feelings on the occasion were vivid. The cause which he had so faithfully championed and the hopes which he had so long cherished were now to triumph. The new nationality for whose emergence he had laboured was to be fitted with a constitution.

The story of the painstaking sessions of the conference belongs to the general history

of Confederation, and need not be chronicled. In the debates and fashioning of resolutions, McGee's part was less prominent than that of many men who had not laboured as much in the heat of the day. His one recorded motion was to secure the preservation of denominational schools. He moved that to the clause which assigned education to the control of the local legislatures be added the words, "saving the rights and privileges which the Protestant or Catholic minority in both Canadas may possess as to their denominational schools at the time when the constitutional act goes into operation". Throughout the discussions he watched with jealous care the maintenance of minority and local rights, and made the significant confession the following February in defending the Quebec resolutions before the Canadian parliament: "If we had failed to secure every possible constitutional guarantee for minorities, east and west....I myself could have been no party to the conclusions of the late conference. But....in securing the power of disallowance, under circumstances, which might warrant it,

to the general government, in giving the appointment of judges and local governors to the general government, and in expressly providing in the constitution for the educational rights of the minority, we had taken every possible guarantee . . . against the oppression of a sectional minority by a sectional majority."

By the close of the month the conference had brought its labours to a conclusion. Its seventy-two resolutions embodied the framework of confederation. The remaining task was to obtain the confirmation of the various colonial legislatures, and in the following February the resolutions came before the Canadian parliament. Provided that the coalition of party leaders held together, their acceptance was assured. The debate was none the less critical. The ministers had to justify the resolutions not merely before parliament, but before Canadian public opinion. To render their work difficult Dorion and Sandfield Macdonald stirred up an animated opposition, and some feared that the coalition might break. The government's case for union was contained in five masterly speeches by

Macdonald, Cartier, Brown, Galt, and McGee. Whatever might be the outstanding position of Brown and Macdonald as political leaders wheeling the party machines to make confederation possible, the most vivid orator of the projected Dominion was McGee. "When he rose to speak," said a reporter in the press gallery, "there was the greatest temptation to throw down my pencil and just listen." Fired by the event to the white heat of enthusiasm, he delivered one of his most powerful orations, infused with the imagination and glowing rhetoric of his best performances. He enumerated the military and political reasons for confederation which in the previous eight years he had steadily pleaded. The prospective commercial benefits of union were patent—free access to the sea, an extended market, the breaking down of hostile tariffs, and enhanced credit with England. Nothing short of a confederation would bring such advantages. A Zollverein or commercial union would not satisfy. "If any one for a moment will remember that the trade of the whole front of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia

gravitates at present alongshore to Portland and Boston, while the trade of Upper Canada, west of Kingston, has long gravitated across the lakes to New York, he will see, I think, that a mere Zollverein treaty without a strong political end to serve, and some political power at its back, would be in our new circumstances merely waste paper."

He argued that the political reasons for union were no less imperative: the need of ending the fatal deadlock in the Canadas, the responsibility that rested on the colonies for the shouldering of some imperial burdens, and the immeasurable benefits that would accrue to all the colonies in pooling their common resources and working for common ends. With the inspiring vision of the new nationality, he looked forward to the attainment of a mental union, in which public men from all the colonies might rise from the cramping restraints of local politics and parish business to the expanding affairs of a growing nation. None the less he did not presume that colonial union would weaken the imperial tie. On the contrary, it would strengthen it, and through

it the British North American nationality would be kept in contact with European civilization.

As in his former address McGee emphasized the argument of defence. "I said in this House, during the session of the year 1861, that the first gun fired at Fort Sumter had a message for us. I was unheeded then; I repeat now that every one of the 2700 guns in the field, and every one of the 4600 guns afloat, whenever it opens its mouth, repeats the solemn warning of England—prepare." Intimate observation of American politics had convinced McGee that aggression from the United States was an imminent danger, and the confederation of the colonies was the best precautionary measure of defence. He was confident that the terms of the constitution fashioned by the Quebec Conference satisfied colonial needs, and was "eminently favourable to liberty, because local affairs are left to be dealt with by local bodies and cannot be interfered with by those who have no local interest in them, while matters of a general character are left exclusively to a general government".

After the stormy battle of a month, the resolutions were carried. The Canadas had accepted the projected confederation. But McGee did not relax his efforts to enlighten public opinion on the issue. In the same year he published a little book, *Notes on Federal Governments Past and Present*, outlining for colonial readers the experiments in federal government from the Aetolian and Achaian leagues of ancient Greece to the New Zealand confederation. He also published a collection of speeches on British American union, which remain the most substantial evidence of how earnestly and ably he had pleaded his cherished cause. But it was chiefly from the platform that he shaped the public mind. His oratory had now reached an impressive maturity, and the reminiscences of all who heard him at the time agree as to the charm and power of his spoken words.

Sir George Ross related vividly how as a young school teacher in 1865 he was thrilled by McGee's speech at London, Ontario, on the future of British North America. His impressions bring before one the living McGee,

as he appeared to Canadian audiences in the period of confederation. "After a ride of fifteen miles on a summer evening, I found myself in front of one of the greatest orators of the day. I had never heard or seen Mr. McGee before that day—or since. I am not sure that I had even read any of his speeches, unless it might have been in the condensed reports of the debates in Parliament. I had no preconception of oratory as a fine art or what were its essential elements. . . . But whatever it was, I was there to see and learn for myself. My first reflection as McGee rose to speak was that oratory was not necessarily associated with personal attractiveness. Mr. McGee, I observed, was not a handsome man. His face was flat and heavy—a face which no one would turn around to look at a second time. My second reflection was that physical action in oratory was not essential for effect. During the whole course of his two hours' address he stood fixed to one spot on the platform, with his hands clasped behind his back. Only once did he unlock them, and that was when carried away by the enthusiasm

of a quotation from Tennyson's 'Brook', he repeated in thrilling tones the words, 'Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever'. This he applied to the British Empire. It was a glorious climax to his argument, felt and remembered to this day. The mellow richness of Mr. McGee's voice, and the rhythm and cadence of the Queen's English as it flowed from his lips, greatly impressed me. I noted also the finish of his sentences, coupled with a poetical glow which awakened emotions and feelings never before touched by the human voice. Of course argument and fact and history were there, all beautifully blended. But it was not by these I was affected so much as by the white heat of the mental crucible from which they issued, and the cadence—never monotonous—of the lofty rhetoric with which they were adorned. It was a noble speech, I thought—the product of an exalted being—a revelation of the power of articulate language and passion and poetry all combined. . . . I never heard McGee again, but in reading his speeches even now I see him as in a mirage, standing before me, rolling out his

beautiful sentences with the same grace and affluence of language and voice as he did in 'the leafy month of June,' A.D. 1865."

While McGee was thus assisting in the creation of the Canadian Dominion, the politics of Ireland once more began to intrude on his attention. Like many Irishmen it was his lot to be dogged in the land of his adoption by the gloomy history of his native country. In the sixties Fenianism emerged as a political force in Ireland and particularly in America, and from the outset McGee looked upon it with fear. Its fatal significance in his life makes it necessary to treat briefly the rise and progress of the movement.

Following the famine of 1845, thousands of indigent Irishmen yearly emigrated to the United States, burdened with bitter memories of the starvation and the miseries that followed it. Between 1846 and 1851, more than one million persons died of hunger or its effects and more than one million quitted the country. In the succeeding years many thousands more were yearly evicted from their slender holdings by bankrupt landlords,

anxious to sell their estates to rich graziers. These evicted also sought a subsistence on the other side of the Atlantic. Deep in the heart of each was a love of Ireland, and a hatred no less deep of England, whom the emigrant held responsible for the miseries of his country. In the fifties and sixties this hatred proved the nursing mother of Fenianism. The organizers of the movement were James Stephens, John O'Mahony, John O'Leary, and T. C. Luby. All of these men had been in one way or another implicated in the movement of 1848, although none so prominently as McGee. The two most dynamic characters were Stephens and O'Mahony. None can doubt their genuine love for Ireland. Their ideal of gaining its independence accompanied them when they fled as fugitive rebels to Paris. In 1850, they separated, O'Mahony going to New York and Stephens eventually returning to Ireland, but neither lost his youthful dream of Irish freedom. In the following years it led them into the shadowy paths of conspiracy. In America O'Mahony established the Fenian Brotherhood, named after the

Fianna or Fenians who in early centuries were soldiers devoted to the cause of Ireland. He adopted the name as suitable for the men whom he was organizing for the championship of the national cause by secret enterprise and warfare. In Ireland Stephens developed a society on similar lines, but his secret army from the outset was handicapped by lack of funds. The movement on both sides of the Atlantic made little headway until the closing period of the American Civil War. It then loomed into supreme significance. In the southern and northern armies were thousands of Irish. An Irish brigade, fighting for the north, had won the highest laurels on many a contested field. On the conclusion of the war these hardened veterans were eager to turn their bayonets to the cause of freeing Ireland, and they swelled the Fenian ranks. At Boston, in 1865, O'Mahony boldly proclaimed their aim. "Ours is the only policy that can right the wrongs of Ireland. The days of peaceful agitation, of petitioning and parliamentary humbug is past forever in Ireland. The sword alone can win the liberty of that green

isle. Away then with all associations that do not propose to win Irish liberty by the stalwart arms of Irishmen."

The Fenian brotherhood had an intricate organization, with local bodies called circles, all under the control of a head centre. During 1865 it spread rapidly through the United States, and penetrated into Canada, having many adherents in Montreal and Toronto, with a zealous leader in Michael Murphy. O'Mahony believed in concentrating on Ireland, but two American leaders, Sweeny and Roberts, preached the need of injuring British power by invading Canada. Their views prevailed among a body of their adherents, and preparations were made to carry their threat into effect. In view of the many thousands of veterans disbanded by the northern government, the situation was grave for Canada, and was rendered doubly so by the strained relations existing between Britain and the United States.

McGee grasped the seriousness of the situation. From the outset he viewed the Fenian movement with hostility. He had not

lost his lyric love for Ireland nor had he resigned his hope that Ireland's aspirations for self-government might be satisfied. But he had long turned his back upon the methods of revolution. He was convinced that a revolution in Ireland was impracticable, and that an unsuccessful rising would bring injury rather than benefit, notwithstanding all the argument and passion of Stephens and O'Mahony. Moreover, from the time that he took up residence in Canada, he condemned the introduction of Irish questions into Canadian politics. He believed that one of the weaknesses of his countrymen was their long memory, and their tendency to feed on past misfortunes. In his famous Ottawa address of October, 1857, he declared that, in the new country of his adoption he would not be guided by the hostility towards Britain, which he had inherited from his native country. Irish politics and Canadian interests could not be wholesomely mixed, and it was by the interests of the country in which he lived that he would shape his career. The new nationality of which he made himself the apostle could not

be advanced by the importation of prickly disputes from another country. In March, 1861, he gave frank advice to his Irish countrymen in Montreal,—“I hold we have no right to intrude our Irish patriotism on this soil; for our first duty is to the land where we live and have fixed our homes, and where, while we live, we must find the true sphere of our duties. While always ready therefore to say the right word, and to do the right act for the land of my forefathers, I am bound above all to the land where I reside; and especially am I bound to put down, so far as one humble layman can, the insensate spread of a strife which can only tend to prolong our period of provincialism and make the country an undesirable home for those who would otherwise willingly cast in their lot among us. We have acres enough; powers mechanical and powers natural; and sources of credit enough to make out of this province a great nation, and though I wish to commit no one to my opinion, I trust that it will not only be so in itself, but will one day form part of a greater British North American state, existing under the

sanction, and in perpetual alliance with the empire, under which it had its rise and growth."

When Fenianism began to spread, he was trenchant in his attack. To him it was a disruptive conspiracy which could bring only disaster in its wake. In January, 1865, he was invited to deliver an address before the St. Patrick's society of Montreal, and with bitterness, bold but not discreet, he described the Fenian brotherhood as "a seditious Irish society, originating at New York, whose founders have chosen to go behind the long Christian record of their ancestors, to find in days of Pagan darkness and blindness an appropriate name for themselves". In reply to the journalistic reports that Fenianism was spreading in Upper Canada, he declared emphatically: "I would say to the Catholics of Upper Canada, in each locality, if there is any, the least proof that this foreign disease has seized on any, the least among you, establish at once for your own sakes—for the country's sake—a *cordon sanitaire* around your people; establish a committee which will

purge your ranks of this political leprosy; weed out and cast off these rotten members who, without a single governmental grievance to complain of in Canada, would yet weaken and divide us in these days of danger and anxiety.”

With these audacious words he flung down the gage of battle to Fenianism, and the contest continued unabated to his death. From the outset his attitude placed him in peril. In the eyes of the more relentless Fenians, he was an apostate whose death would remove an obstacle to the triumph of their cause among the Canadian Irish. His visit to Ireland in the spring of 1865 added fuel to the hatred in which he was held. He had been sent over as Canadian representative to the international exhibition at Dublin, an honour he deeply appreciated. While visiting his father in Wexford, he delivered an address, far-reaching in its effects. Reviewing his past career in Ireland, he stated that the political aims of Young Ireland had been foolish—a sufficient evidence of apostacy which his warmest Irish friends did not welcome. But his remarks

concerning the Irish Americans caused more resentment. He warned his audience that there was no national sympathy in the United States with Ireland and its struggle for autonomy, notwithstanding the rhetoric of Irish American orators. "In the United States there is no more sympathy for Ireland than for Japan, and far less than for Russia. In New England the people, tinctured with puritanism, proud of their property and of their education, hate the Irish emigrant for his creed, despise him for his poverty, and under-rate him for his want of book learning." These were unsavoury statements to those who lauded the institutions and people of republican America in contrast to those of the British colonies, and accompanied as they were with caustic remarks concerning the Irish leaders in the United States, they increased the odium in which McGee was held by his Fenian countrymen.

The telegraph wires hurried his speech abroad, and in every quarter it created a sensation. The complimentary remarks of *The Times*—a very conservative organ in its

attitude towards Ireland—were sufficient to condemn his address in the estimation of nationalist Irishmen. “We commend the speech of D’Arcy McGee at Wexford to the attention of all intending emigrants to America—to the attention of all the discontented classes in Ireland—to the attention of all who believe that there is anything to be gained by plots and conspiracies against the British government.” The *Dublin Nation*, in whose columns McGee as a Young Irelander had written regularly, admitted regretfully a marked falling away from his attitude in 1848. “Irish nationalists of the generation which has entered public life since 1848 will surely be startled by the boldness and severity of Mr. McGee’s judgments on men and movements amongst which he himself figured so prominently seventeen years ago. . . . They reveal a fact long known—and which indeed Mr. McGee has never affected to conceal—that of all the Young Ireland leaders, he has receded farthest in the rebound or reaction which followed upon the collapse of that unhappy year of revolutions.”

Amongst many Irish in Montreal McGee's Wexford speech aroused anger and resentment. Six hundred of his constituents issued an emphatic disclaimer. At some public meetings his name was hissed as a Judas. During the Hibernian society picnic at Niagara Falls, three groans were given for the traitor McGee. But he had put his hand to the plough, and he was determined not to turn back on the furrow. During a speech in November he attacked with increased severity the folly of those who supported Fenianism. He sneered upon the mock republic which the Fenians had established in New York, with O'Mahony, an escaped lunatic, as president. With withering scorn he declared: "Many of my friends complain that in my Wexford speech I ought to have diluted my address with some strictures on the Irish grievances, which badly call for redress. I recognize these grievances as well as they do. I will go as far as any man in a constitutional effort to obtain redress. I will resign, if necessary, my place in the ministry, so as to move a resolution in parliament along this line. God

knows the Ireland I loved in my youth is near and dear to my heart. She was a fair and radiant vision, full of the holy self-sacrifice of the older time, but this Billingsgate beldame, reeling and dishevelled from the purlieus of New York, with blasphemy on her lips, and all uncleanness in her breast, this shameless impostor I resist with scorn and detestation." Such provocative words merely widened the breach between McGee and his Fenian countrymen. They may have restrained many Canadian Irish from joining the Fenian conspiracy, but they infuriated the extremists, who did not bury their hate.

In June, 1866, the crisis in the history of Fenianism occurred. The long projected invasion of Canada took place. One thousand American Irish under the command of Col. O'Neill, a man who had fought with distinction under Sherman, crossed the Niagara river. They won a slight skirmish at Ridgeway, but the threatened interference of the American government combined with the difficulty of bringing up reinforcements forced them back across the river. The gathering

storm had passed, but it left bitter memories behind. The trials of arrested Fenians kept feeling high, and in this state of ferment the last year of the old régime in Canada passed. The failure of the invasion left Canadians free to complete the work of Confederation.

## CHAPTER VI

### CLOSING YEARS

IN November, 1866, the delegation of ministers appointed to represent Canada at the final drafting of the federal constitution sailed for England. McGee was not a member of the party, but some months later, in February, 1867, he also left on what was destined to be his last visit to Europe. He went primarily to represent Canada at the international exposition which Louis Napoleon in a burst of goodwill held in Paris. At this time his mind continued to be distressed by the Fenian movement in Ireland and in America, and his imagination grappled with plans whereby Irish discontent might be allayed. It was characteristic that one of his first acts on reaching England was to address letters on the question to the two leaders of the government, Lord Derby and his brilliant lieutenant, Benjamin Disraeli. He emphasized that the first task of Britain was to re-establish confidence

among the Irish people in the good intentions of imperial statesmen. The blundering policy of the past had blasted such confidence. The surest means to its repair was to refer the whole state of Ireland to a royal commission of leading Irishmen in whom the people might have faith. Thus the local confidence felt in the individuals might by a natural effect be transferred to the government which appointed them, and the first step in the reconciliation of the two islands be attained. Future advances might then be made upon the lines laid down by the commission. McGee's suggestion was at the time apparently too bold for imperial statesmen, yet it was substantially carried into effect fifty years later when the famous convention under the chairmanship of Sir Horace Plunkett met in the Dublin rotunda.

Hurrying on from London, McGee reached Rome in March. Professional business called him there. A dispute had arisen in Montreal between St. Patrick's parish church and the Roman Catholic bishop in ordinary, who sought to divide the parish. An appeal

was made to the Pope. McGee, with Thomas Ryan, represented the case of St. Patrick's, and obtained a favourable answer to their suit. It is to be expected that with his deep Catholic sympathies and sensitive imagination, McGee would be much impressed by the ancient capital of the Catholic world. "I shall never," he wrote, "be able to get this city out of my memory and imagination." But he was soon in an atmosphere very different from the haunting impressiveness of Rome.

In April he was back in Paris for the opening of the exposition on May 1. The French capital seldom seemed so gay as in the spring of 1867. Although the Second Empire was undermined and was soon to tumble like a house of cards, it had all the glitter of tinsel splendour. Louis Napoleon, in the heyday of his career, presided royally over the exhibition which his government had assembled, and he honoured Canada, the youngest nation, by the appointment of McGee as an examiner for prizes. But amid Parisian magnificence, McGee was not forgetful of those affairs which surrounded the birth of the Canadian Domin-

ion. One political event filled him with uneasiness. The Reformers who followed George Brown began to kick against the traces of the coalition. They had agreed to support the government upon all questions directly affecting confederation, but they announced that just as soon as the constitution became law they would withdraw their support. Brown with his pronounced puritan earnestness and sledge-hammer methods preached that all coalitions were evil, and none more evil than that formed by John A. Macdonald. In the estimation of McGee, there were grave dangers involved in the renewal of party warfare. Federation was by no means out of the woods. The hostile attitude of large numbers in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined with the recommencement of party strife in the Canadas might well imperil the structure so painfully erected. On April 9, 1867, he penned his fears to Macdonald who was then in London. "There seem some rather embarrassing symptoms of old party warfare getting up again, before confederation has even had a trial. Theoretically, it is true, the work is

done, but practically it is only beginning. At such a real crisis personal and party politics might afford to listen awhile."

Of more significance was his political circular dispatched from Paris in May. In the main it was an attack on the revival of the old parties, besmeared as they were with the mud of former conflicts. It contained the plea that "parties may, or rather must, arise under the operations of the new constitution itself; but let them arise out of conflicts of interpretation; out of the sequence of events; out of the merits or demerits of the policy or want of policy of the first federal administration. Do not let us, for our common country's sake—for the dear sake of our existence, not to say establishment, as a distinct free people, in North America—usher in our new condition of things, by raking up old sores and pelting each other with old nicknames". There was danger not merely of party conflict hampering the new institutions, but of Canadian statesmen meeting the venture of the young Dominion with minds insufficiently occupied with constructive plans. McGee briefly outlined

his own views on such pressing questions as colonization, railway building, protective legislation, and educational institutions. On all these matters action had soon to be taken, and it was the path of wisdom to think about them early.

On May 25, he was back in Montreal. The civic reception was warm and sincere, but it was not without its shadows. It was clear that McGee no longer had the unanimous homage of his constituents. His truceless war upon Fenianism had left him many enemies amongst the Irish population, and mingled with the voices of welcome were those of criticism. Yet the message with which he greeted his constituents was the same plea of good will, reinforced with his artistry of words, which he had so long generously advanced. "Many of the young men here to-day will live to see the proof of what I am about to state, that all other politics that have been preached in British America will grow old and lose their lustre, but the conciliation of class and class, the policy of linking together all our people in one solid

chain, and making up for the comparative paucity of our members, being as we are a small people in this respect, by the moral influence of our unity; the policy of smoothing down the sharp and wounding edges of hostile prejudices; the policy of making all feel an interest in the country, and each man in the character of each section of the community, and of each other—each for all, and all for each—this policy will never grow old, never will lose its lustre. The day never will come when the excellency of its beauty will depart, so long as there is such a geographic denomination as Canada.”

An incident soon occurred which showed how ready was McGee to sacrifice his own ambitions for the cause he eloquently pleaded. In June, John A. Macdonald grappled with the task of forming the first ministry of the Dominion which was to be proclaimed on July 1. His difficulties were acute. Cartier, with Gallic petulance, insisted upon having in the cabinet three French-Canadian representatives. The Protestant minority of Lower Canada, with Galt as leader, also

demanded representation. McGee, as the most distinguished of the Irish Roman Catholics, and as one of the most influential champions of federation, was unquestionably entitled to office. Thus there would have been five ministers from the province of Quebec. But Howland and McDougall, reformers from the upper province who supported Macdonald, demanded that Ontario, in virtue of its larger population, should have one more member than Quebec. To satisfy all parties would mean that Ontario and Quebec should have between them eleven cabinet seats. With two representatives from each of the maritime provinces the cabinet would in the estimation of Macdonald be unworkably large. So much was he repelled by the prospect that he was on the point of advising the governor-general to send for Brown when Tupper and McGee volunteered to facilitate matters by declining office. One of the two Nova Scotian members might then be a representative of the Roman Catholics, and Tupper proposed Edward Kenny of Halifax as a suitable man. Macdonald accepted this generous offer, which on his own

confession enabled him to patch together the first cabinet of the Dominion.

The sacrifice on the part of McGee and Tupper was considerable. They were men in that lusty prime of life when the passion for building a career is strong. Both had worked for confederation with a zeal exceeded by none. For McGee an office in the first cabinet of the Dominion, whose emergence he had long heralded, would have been a deep satisfaction. His mind was charged with plans for the strengthening of the young nation. All the imaginative schemes which the "Canada First" party later championed were in his thoughts, and would have found in him an eloquent exponent. Yet he stepped aside from such prospects of attaining a certain distinction, without the slightest attempt to bargain for place or office, and the self-denial was the keener in that his pecuniary means were slender.

Following soon upon the announcement of the new government on July 1, the election campaign for the first Canadian parliament began. It was McGee's last and most strenu-

ous contest. The issue in his constituency was Fenianism. For the first time, a large body of his constituents chose as an opponent an Irish Roman Catholic, a Mr. Devlin, who canvassed for the radical vote. From the outset the campaign was tumultuous. McGee's first meeting was broken up by the violence of a mob and he himself narrowly escaped injury. But he was not cowed. He had learned that in public life one must be prepared to pass the fierce test of election trials. He was determined to fight the opposition without gloves. In August he published a series of letters reviewing the growth of the Fenian brotherhood in Montreal. With an indiscreet boldness, he named the men who had been leaders in conspiracy and made public their communications with the headquarters in New York. Such an exposure, incriminating many leading Montreal Irishmen, intensified the bitterness of the contest. Among his opponents were relentless men who were determined to make it now a fight to the death. His life came to be in danger, and during the remainder of the campaign he was

under police protection. On nomination day, August 20, a mob jostled him from the hustings, and the lives of his friends were threatened. In spite of this he carried the election, although with a much depleted majority. One ominous fact stood out amid the tumults of these weeks. He had lost the unanimous homage of his Catholic countrymen. Formal evidence of this was exhibited some months later when his name was struck from the lists of the St. Patrick's society, of which he had formerly been the president.

In November the parliament of the Dominion assembled. It might seem that Confederation, being carried, was no longer an issue. Such was by no means the case. Nova Scotia had repented her action in joining with the other colonies, and in a mood of sulkiness sent to parliament a solid phalanx of anti-unionists directed by a veteran political strategist, Joseph Howe. It was a singular twist of circumstances and personal motives which pushed Howe to the front as an opponent of federation. Little more than four years before, when on the mention of colonial union

the heart of the average politician failed him with fear, Joseph Howe had stood at Halifax on the same platform with McGee and used his eloquent tongue for the advancement of colonial co-operation. As a popularizer of the idea of union, he ranked close to McGee, as in native eloquence he was scarcely inferior. But while the member for Montreal without deviation pleaded in season and out of season the great cause which had captivated his imagination, Howe at the critical time drew back, and blemished a great career by endeavouring to block what he had formerly advocated. Whatever were the reasons influencing him—and they were not all selfish—he was not found reaping in the field where he, McGee, and others had sown. In November he was attacking Confederation in the House, and McGee with stern admonishing eloquence was defending it against his assault.

In the succeeding months McGee's activity was as varied and ceaseless as ever. He was still in very large demand as a lecturer, and with personal trouble and expense he went long distances to deliver lectures for the

benefit of charities. One of his most famous addresses was on *The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion*, delivered in Montreal on November 4, 1867, in which he pleaded for the development of mental self-reliance as an essential condition of political independence. A literature to shape and express the mind of the new nation was as imperative as self-governing institutions. At the time Canada had no literature. Journalism, it is true, flourished like a green bay tree. In the four provinces there were about one hundred and thirty journals, thirty of which were published daily. But this ephemeral literature was characterized by a narrowness of view, a local egotism, and a lamentable absence of anything approaching a catholic spirit. In addition to elevating the tone of journalism, McGee believed that Canadians with national development at heart must encourage a literature "calculated to our own meridian, and hitting home our own society, either where it is sluggish or priggish, or wholly defective in its present style of culture". Literary talent should be cherished as precious. He hoped

that "if a native book should lack the finish of a foreign one, as a novice may well be less expert than an old hand, yet if the book be honestly designed, and conscientiously worked up, the author shall be encouraged, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the better things which we look forward to with hopefulness. I make this plea on behalf of those who venture upon authorship among us because I believe the existence of a recognized literary class will by and by be felt as a state and social necessity." The new northern nation, notwithstanding that it possessed all the benefits which Nature could possibly bestow, would still in his estimation be impoverished if it failed to develop a cultural life. He endeavoured to direct the attention of Canadians to the fact that there should be built upon the political unity already attained a life of the mind on which the vitality of a nation finally depended.

The cause of union which had fired McGee's mind since his immigration to Canada was now attained. What was to be his future? Political life had never failed to attract him,

for he liked its intensities of struggle. His future in Canadian politics was secure. Few public men of the time were held in such esteem throughout the British provinces, and none had so quickly jumped into prominence. His career was not closed by his absence from the first cabinet of the Dominion. Macdonald had confessed that his admission to a cabinet office could only be a matter of short delay. Yet work other than that of public life attracted him. He had never lost the ideal, born in his youth, of devoting himself to literature. By temperament he was a man of letters. His vivid imagination sought expression in the creation of what might be a permanent addition to literature:

I dreamed a dream when the woods were green,  
And my April heart made an April scene,  
In the far, far distant land,  
That even I might something do  
That would keep my memory for the true,  
And my name from the spoiler's hand!

From the summer of 1867, he looked forward to obtaining a commissionership under the government, which would maintain him and

his family, while providing leisure for literary work. These were the hopes shattered suddenly by his murder.

During January and February, 1868, McGee was seriously ill in Montreal, but in March he was back in Ottawa for the opening of parliament. The crucial issue of the period was the inclusion of Nova Scotia in the federation. A delegation of Nova Scotians headed by the redoubtable Howe had gone to Britain to obtain the support of British statesmen in the endeavour to release their province from the federation. To neutralize their influence by stating the counter case, the Canadian government in March sent over Tupper. To the Nova Scotian anti-unionists—and they constituted a majority of the representatives of the province—the little energetic doctor was anathema. With painstaking bitterness, they assailed his appointment. On the evening of April 6, Dr. Parker, a Nova Scotian representative, made a personal attack on Tupper, demanding his recall. He declared that he was “utterly disqualified for being a representative of the Dominion, and sending

him only deepened the disaffection of the sister province of Nova Scotia”.

In reply to Parker, McGee declared that the motion to recall Tupper was delivering Confederation a stab in the dark. “If he had been in earnest in wishing to give the new system a fair trial, he would have said: I do not think Mr. Tupper was the best choice, but since he has gone I wish him all success for the sake of the union.” In impassioned words which show how poignantly his own bitter struggle with Fenianism was on his mind, he argued that Tupper should not be judged by the transitory ill-esteem in which he was held by his countrymen. “We should not make a mere local or temporary popularity the test of the qualification of a public servant. He who built on popularity built on a shifting sand. The man who showed he was ready to suffer for his principles as well as triumph with his principles was far beyond comparison with the mere popularity hunter. It would be a base spirit to sacrifice the man who had sacrificed himself for the sake of the union.” No attentive parliamentarian who heard these

words could have foreseen that in little more than an hour McGee himself was to be sacrificed for his opinions.

No less significant than his defence of Tupper was his plea that Nova Scotia should await the action of time for the consolidation of the provinces into a great nation, all parts of which would find justice. "I have great reliance on the mellowing effects of time. It is not the lime, and the sand, and the hair of the mortar, but the time which has taken to temper it. And if time be so necessary an element in so rudimentary a process as the mixing of mortar, of how much greater importance must it be in the work of consolidating the confederation of these provinces. Time, sir, will heal all existing irritations; time will mellow and refine all points of contrast that seem so harsh to-day; time will come to the aid of the pervading principles of impartial justice, which happily permeate the whole land. By and by time will show the constitution of this Dominion as much cherished in the hearts of the people of all its provinces, not excepting Nova Scotia, as is

the British constitution itself." Such was McGee's last confession of faith. It lost none of its force in the grace and beauty of its language.

He spoke at midnight. Shortly after one o'clock on the morning of the 7th, the debate closed. The members, while putting on their coats, commented generally on McGee's speech; some thought that it was the most effective they had ever heard him deliver. He lit his cigar, and in company with Macfarlane, a very intimate friend, went down the board walk towards his lodging. It was an exhilarating night, with a bright full moon and the tonic air of early spring. McGee was in elated spirits. Perhaps part of his light-heartedness was caused by the reflection that on the morrow he would return to Montreal, where his wife and daughters were, within a few days to celebrate his forty-third birthday. Letters from home had informed him of the preparations. At what is now one of Ottawa's busy corners, that of Sparks and Metcalfe Streets, he left his friend, and alone walked to his lodging on Sparks Street. As he en-

deavoured to open his door with a latch key, a slight figure glided up and at close range fired a bullet into his head. There was no cry, only the deadly crack of the pistol, and McGee pitched forward on his doorstep. His work done, the assassin dashed away in the night, but left tell-tale steps in the snow, later to assist in his conviction. Some inmates of the house, who had not retired, immediately discovered the body, and soon the dreary news was circulating through Ottawa and across the telegraph wires to all parts of the Dominion.

The following afternoon, Sir John Macdonald before a gloomy chamber gave expression to the public sorrow, and in token of it adjourned the House. Meanwhile Ottawa was feverishly searched for the assassin. The prison was soon filled with suspects. The Dominion government offered \$5,000 reward for information concerning the culprit or culprits, and the two provinces, Quebec and Ontario, each offered \$2,500. Incriminating evidence quickly accumulated against Patrick James Whelan, a comparatively young

man, whose trial began on the 17th of the month. From the outset the chain of circumstantial evidence against him was strong. He had long been implicated in the Fenian movement, having been discharged from the army in Quebec for Fenian sentiments. He had but recently come to Ottawa, and on the night of the murder had been seen in the gallery of the house. After his arrest there was found in his possession a revolver, one chamber of which had been recently discharged. But the most conclusive of the many facts of evidence was submitted by a French Canadian, Lacroix, who declared that he saw Whelan commit the deed. Notwithstanding the weighty case relentlessly built up by the prosecuting attorney the trial dragged wearily into the following year. Finally, on February 11, 1869, Whelan, pleading innocence to the end, met his death on the scaffold. It has remained problematical how far he was the fatal instrument of the Fenian brotherhood or how far his action, like that of the man who shot Lincoln, was due merely to personal hate. The evidence would seem to

make it clear that Whelan did not receive instructions from a head centre outside the country, but that he performed the deed to satisfy the hatred of himself and a few Canadian Fenians whose identity is uncertain.

McGee died a martyr for the young Dominion. Such was the judgment of contemporaries, and history need not reject it. On the day following the murder, Sir John Macdonald described "how easy it would have been for him, had he chosen, to have sailed along the full tide of popularity with thousands and hundreds of thousands, without the loss of a single plaudit, but he has been slain, and I fear slain because he preferred the path of duty". From the time that he resolved to fight Fenianism, his life was in danger. Had he been more passive, and allowed the movement to wreck itself, he would not have incurred the enmity of Whelan and his associates. But McGee never entered a cause half-heartedly. He had the firm conviction that Fenianism was a menace, not merely to Canada, but to Ireland. It represented an anarchical and revolutionary

spirit which long ago he had come to dread. It endeavoured to overthrow the British Empire, which he considered a magnificent instrument in spreading civilization. Hence he fought it with as much intensity as he had formerly struggled for Irish independence, and his guilt, to the minds of his opponents, was that of an apostate as well as of an enemy.

As McGee's last speech was a plea for the conciliation of all members of the new Dominion, so his last letter of public significance was a passionate plea for reform in Ireland. Just two days before his death he had dined with an old Ottawa friend, Alderman Goodwin, and after dinner had excused himself to pen a letter to Lord Mayo, then chief secretary for Ireland, which was described aptly by a contemporary as having "struck the heart of the British nation like a cry for justice from the grave". In a parliamentary speech, Lord Mayo had referred to McGee's loyalty as that of a Canadian Irishman. McGee in his letter endeavoured to make clear why Irishmen like himself were loyal in Canada, and how the loyalty of those in

Ireland might be won. Canada did not have the abuses which in Ireland was the prime source of discontent. There was no established church, no system of tenancy at will, no poor laws, nor any need of them. Instead there was the recognition of complete religious equality, a general acquisition of property as the reward of well-directed industry, and the fullest local control of revenues and resources. Such was the head-spring of Irish loyalty in Canada, and "were it otherwise, we would be otherwise". This letter is the best apology for the chequered career of the young Irish rebel of 1848, who died twenty years later the champion of a British American nationality, linked by bonds of sentiment to the Britain across the seas.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

**M**cGEE'S position among the few outstanding fathers of Confederation is secure. His work was not that of a constitutional architect giving expression to political needs in the legal terms of a constitution. Nor was he a party leader, subtly pulling together the strings guiding political groups, and through the resulting combination carrying measures beneficial to the community. In both these fields Sir John Macdonald easily carries away most of the honours. McGee's task was that of inspiration. His position was that of a prophet and a guide. Creative statesmen fall into two categories—those who inspire a people to establish new structures, and those who build in under their influence the bricks and mortar of the new creation. McGee, in the most plastic period of Canadian history, belonged to the former class. Throughout the brief span of his life

in Canada, he had been the untiring advocate of union amongst the colonies. He had championed it in the press and on public platforms from Lake Huron to the Atlantic. In the legislature, he had pushed it forward through the weary bickerings over much smaller issues. He had made the colonists realize that to them there was no subject of equal magnitude. This was the prime question of their destiny.

Coming to the Canadas as a stranger, his mind was not cramped by local patriotism nor handicapped by the shortness of vision characteristic of many colonial leaders. He saw the common interests of all the colonies to a degree that was difficult with men who had matured within the confines of one, and who were content to worship only at its shrine.

He had an additional advantage. He had been reared in an old community with long traditions and in possession of that virile community-consciousness which we call nationality. His mind had developed in contact with a group of young brilliant men who sought to revivify the life of their nation, and who went to its traditions for inspiration.

McGee never lost the effect of such experiences and aspirations. The vision of giving new vitality to a nation and setting it on the path of fresh development continued to stir his imagination. When he came to Canada, he did not find an old community, as in Ireland, in need of inspiration for fresh accomplishments; he found all the elements necessary for the building of a new northern nation, and the prospect of assisting its creation was the spur of his Canadian career.

Union of the colonies was the first and most important step towards the attainment of a national existence. It was the essential foundation for everything else. But McGee did not overlook other and subsidiary policies necessary for the same end. That on which he had laid most emphasis was the development of a broad-minded national spirit which would sponge out from politics the influence of sectarian and sectional interests. Tolerance of the differences of race and creed must, he argued, be the corner stone of the Dominion. There was need of emphasizing this doctrine, for the parochialism of colonial government and the seclusion of colonial society tended to

shut out the healthy air of large affairs, and develop a pettiness of mind and an intolerance of spirit. The differences between the French and the English—differences of race and creed—seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle to the emergence of a national community embracing them all. But McGee was not despondent over such differences. He believed that the task of the new nationality was to reconcile them through toleration. In 1865, in St. John, he declared that “the bilingual line which divides us socially is one of the difficulties of the government of the country. But though a difficulty it is by no means a serious danger, unless it were to be aggravated by a sense of injustice, inflicted either by the local French majority on the English minority, or by the English majority on the French minority. So long as we respect in Canada the rights of minorities, told either by tongue or creed, we are safe, for so long it will be possible for us to be united; but when we cease to respect those rights, we will be in the full tide towards that madness which the ancients considered the gods sent to those whom they wished to destroy.”

It is always difficult to determine accurately the influence of a political educator. There is no exception in the case of McGee. But there is not the slightest doubt that his effect on the colonial mind was very considerable. While he was expounding throughout the country his great cause, a number of young and able men were growing to maturity who later bore eloquent testimony to the penetrating influence of his teaching. The prominent members of this group—H. J. Morgan, Charles Mair, R. J. Haliburton, G. T. Denison, and W. A. Foster—formed a few years after McGee's death the "Canada First" party, dedicated to the task of advancing the cause of Canadian nationality. In this brilliant party, McGee left disciples to champion all that he had projected. In 1871, their ideas and visions found expression in a lecture of W. A. Foster, entitled *Canada First, or Our New Nationality*. Foster gave to McGee the premier position among those instrumental in arousing a Canadian national idealism. He paid the warm homage of himself and his associates in a passage remarkable alike for its passionate eloquence

and for its unstinted admiration of the man who inspired it:

There is a name I would fain approach with befitting reverence, for it casts athwart memory the shadow of all those qualities that man admires in man. It tells of one in whom the generous enthusiasm of youth was but hallowed by the experiences of cultured manhood; of one who lavished the warm love of an Irish heart on the land of his birth, yet gave a loyal and true affection to the land of his adoption; who strove with all the power of genius to convert the stagnant pool of politics into a stream of living water; who dared to be national in the face of provincial selfishness, and impartially liberal in the teeth of sectarian strife; who from Halifax to Sandwich sowed broadcast the seeds of a higher national life, and with persuasive eloquence drew us closer together as a people, pointing out to each what was good in the other, wreathing our sympathies and blending our hopes; yes! one who breathed into our new Dominion the spirit of a proud self-reliance, and first taught Canadians to respect themselves. Was it a wonder that a cry of agony rang throughout the land when murder, foul and most unnatural, drank the life-blood of Thomas D'Arcy McGee?

The memory and influence of McGee lived not merely in the counsels of the "Canada First" party, but in the efforts of Canadian statesmen in succeeding years to make Canada strong within herself. Even when leaders appeared who may have forgotten his name and had not heard in the legislature or on the public platform his silver speech, their work for the completion of Canadian autonomy was but a fulfilment of what he had advocated. Canada as a self-governing nation, linked fraternally to Britain and other parts of the Empire, was McGee's goal for the Canadian people. Since Confederation they have been steadily advancing towards it, and thus paying homage to the strength and vision of McGee's ideals.

McGee has importance in Canadian history for other reasons than his statesmanship. He holds no mean place in Canadian literature. Historical myth puts into the mouth of Wolfe the remark that he would sooner have written Gray's "Elegy" than take Quebec. The poet may be greater than the soldier, and similarly the literary artist may

be placed above the statesman; yet statecraft has drawn fervid minds from poetry to political action. It drew McGee. While, in temperament and aspiration, he was a man of letters, so resistless was the attraction of politics that in it he expended most of his energies. But any account of his life which would leave out of consideration McGee as a *littérateur* would be incomplete. Something has already been said about his oratory. A native oratory was one of the most distinctive elements in his equipment as he started on the path to fame. Yet from the outset he used his pen more frequently than his tongue. From his first arrival in America to his death, he wrote continuously prose and poetry.

Most of this literary output found expression in the journals with which he had been connected, but he left to his name a goodly number of volumes dealing with historical and biographical subjects. Of these two have already been mentioned as contributing to the cause of Canadian Confederation, *Notes on Federal Government Past and Present* and *Speeches on British American*

*Union.* All the others deal with Irish history and biography, which next to living political causes engaged McGee's imagination. The most noted of these books was his *Popular History of Ireland*, on which he had begun earnest labour in 1858, but which exacting political activities had prevented him from finishing till 1863. On many an evening within these years, he would retire to his room from the battles of parliamentary debate and, forgetful for the time being of Canadian problems, would trace out the struggle of the Vikings for Ireland or some other dramatic phase of Irish history.

Within his life-time no complete collection of his poems was made. They appeared chiefly in the various newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic to which he had contributed. The year after his death they were collected and published by his friend Mrs. Sadler. One little volume he himself published in 1858, *Canadian Ballads and Occasional Verses*. It was a worthy tribute to his interest in the history of his newly adopted country, and was addressed to those

who looked forward to the development of the colonies into a great new northern nation. The subject matter of his verses is varied. Many deal with the affections; others are religious in sentiment; but the greater number are patriotic and historical. They are concerned with the saints and heroes of Ireland's story, from St. Patrick to Smith O'Brien. They throb with the fervour of a patriot as they tell of Innisfail, the Ireland of ancient times, and of how

Long, long ago, beyond the misty space  
Of twice a thousand years,  
In Erin old there dwelt a mighty race,  
Taller than Roman spears;  
Like oaks and towers, they had a giant grace,  
Were fleet as deers,  
With winds and wave they made their 'biding  
place,  
These Western shepherd-seers.

McGee's imagination revelled in the traditions and myths of the Celts. He expressed that brooding melancholy over the past which has ever been the pervading sentiment of Irish poetry. He believed that the Celtic race had a soul that was chastened

by past misfortunes, and yet was not without hope in the present. He invoked it in the lines:

Soul of my race! Soul eternal!  
That liveth through evil and time—  
That twineth still laurels all vernal,  
As if laurels could once more be thine!  
Oh hear me, oh cheer me, be near me,  
Oh guide me or chide me away,  
But do not fly from me or fear me—  
I'm all clay when thou, Soul, art away.

McGee's poetry was shaped largely by the group of Young Ireland who taught that verse might be used as a convenient means of drawing upon Irish traditions for the purpose of arousing a national consciousness. From its nature such poetry has limitations. It must fail to win the universal appeal of verse with no national end to serve. McGee was not limited in his allegiance to Ireland. His *Canadian Ballads* were inspired by incidents in Canadian history, and were intended to show the fertility of Canadian annals in subjects adaptable to verse. It was his belief that "of all the forms of patriotism, a wise, public-spirited patriotism in literature

is not the least admirable. It is, indeed, glorious to die in battle in defence of our homes or altars; but not less glorious is it to live to celebrate the virtues of our heroic countrymen, to adorn the history, or to preserve the traditions of our country”.

As might be expected in the work of a man enmeshed in the ceaseless activities of public life, to whom poetry was of necessity an embroidery to other activities, his compositions are uneven. They are always spontaneous, but frequently show a roughness that a painstaking workmanship would have removed. Yet there are bursts of genuine lyric quality that will receive the commendation of even the critical. Of a simple beauty are the lines imitated from the Irish and named *A Contrast*:

I.

Bebinn is straight as a poplar,  
Queenly and comely to see,  
But she seems so fit for a sceptre,  
She never could give it to me.  
Aine is lithe as a willow,  
And her eye, whether tearful or gay,  
So true to her thought, that in Aine  
I find a new charm every day.

## II.

Bebinn calmly and silently sails

Down life's stream like a snow-breasted swan;  
She's so lonesomely grand, that she seems  
To shrink from the presence of man.

Aine basks in the glad summer sun,  
Like a young dove let loose in the air;  
Sings, dances, and laughs—but for me  
Her joy does not make her less fair.

## III

Oh! give me the nature that shows  
Its emotions of mirth or of pain,  
As the water that glides, and the corn that grows,  
Show shadow and sunlight again.  
Oh! give me the brow that can bend,  
Oh! give me the eyes that can weep,  
And give me a heart like Lough Neagh,  
As full of emotions and deep.

To Gavan Duffy, the warmest of his friends among the Young Ireland group, he wrote lines that expressed a yearning for an old companionship amid old scenes:

Oh! for one week amid the emerald fields,  
Where the Avoca sings the song of Moore;  
Oh! for the odor the brown heather yields,  
To glad the pilgrim's heart on Glenmalur!

Yet is there still what meeting could not give,  
A joy most suited of all joys to last;  
For, ever in fair memory there must live  
The bright, unclouded picture of the past.

Old friend! the years wear on, and many cares  
And many sorrows both of us have known;  
Time for us both a quiet couch prepares—  
A couch like Jacob's, pillow'd with a stone.

And oh! when thus we sleep may we behold  
The angelic ladder of the Patriarch's dream;  
And may my feet upon its rungs of gold  
Yours follow, as of old, by hill and stream!

Of his Canadian ballads one of the best  
known is *The Arctic Indian's Faith*:

I.

We worship the spirit that walks unseen  
Through our land of ice and snow:  
We know not His face, we know not His place,  
But His presence and power we know.

II.

Does the Buffalo need the Pale-face word  
To find his pathway far?  
What guide has he to the hidden ford,  
Or where the green pastures are?  
Who teacheth the Moose that the hunter's gun  
Is peering out of the shade—  
Who teacheth the doe and the fawn to run  
In the track the Moose has made?

## III.

Him do we follow, Him do we fear—  
The spirit of earth and sky;—  
Who hears with the Wapiti's eager ear  
His poor red children's cry.  
Whose whisper we note in every breeze  
That stirs the birch canoe—  
Who hangs the reindeer moss on the trees  
For the food of the Caribou.

## IV.

That Spirit we worship who walks unseen  
Through our land of ice and snow:  
We know not His face, we know not His place,  
But His presence and power we know.

McGee's power as an orator deserves special mention in this concluding chapter. There are few orators whose speeches have literary value. Supreme eloquence is rare and generally transitory. It is inspired by the gravity of great events or dramatic situations. When the vivid circumstances have passed, the printed sentences divorced from the inspiring presence of the orator lose their former magic influence. Thus, most great speeches come down in history as a feeble echo of what they had been when

delivered. Those of Edmund Burke are an exception that prove the rule. McGee was an orator of great power, and his orations, delivered without the use of notes, live as literature. Something of the beauty of his expressions may be gathered from the few quotations on preceding pages. But these quotations do little to recall their thrilling effect when they were delivered by McGee. Leading contemporaries agreed in giving him the first position amongst the orators of Confederation, and the verdict of contemporaries on such a subject must be accepted. Sir Charles Tupper, on hearing the news of McGee's death, remarked that "the grave has closed over the most eloquent man in Canada." The *Globe*, in an editorial the day after his assassination, stated that "whether his hearers sympathized or not with what he said, it was impossible for anyone not to acknowledge that he was marvellously eloquent; that his words were fitly chosen, and gave every intimation of masterly power.... His wit—his power of sarcasm—his readiness in reply—his aptness in quotation—his pathos which

melted to tears, and his broad humour which convulsed with laughter—were all undoubtedly of a very high order. Among the orators of Canada, either within or without the House, he has not, we believe, left his equal, and even his opponents will miss the speeches in which he developed his plans for promoting the greatness of Canada.” This judgment is all the more convincing in that the *Globe* had been for some years previous hostile to McGee.

Joseph Howe had won many laurels as an orator, yet the brilliant French-Canadian writer, Hector Fabre, considered him inferior to McGee. “Mr. Howe is well adapted to the tribune; he pleases, he amuses, he charms; but a severer taste would say that his is far from the brilliant eloquence, the irreproachable diction, the constantly pure style, the breadth of views and the rectitude of ideas of Mr. McGee. To my mind Mr. McGee is a nearly perfect orator, and one who in many senses has no superior.”

Of McGee’s domestic and private life, little need be said. It was happy in the

highest degree. He was married in the period of his association with Young Ireland, and his wife shared the subsequent adventures of his chequered career, and survived his tragic death. His home presented to all who entered it a charming circle. McGee, with his family, was like a joyous boy. He would often be found romping on the floor with his baby daughter. Of his children only two daughters survived, one of whom took the veil. A genial, convivial nature and an ever sparkling humour won him friends in every part of Canada. One of the many tokens of esteem on the part of his townsfolk in Montreal was the present of a handsome furnished house in one of the best districts of the city. Although an Irishman and a very devout Catholic, he gained the warm homage of the Scotch Presbyterian population in Lower Canada, a homage deeper than that bestowed by the Scotch on any of their own countrymen. At the old Irish and Scottish festival of Hallowe'en he had been an ever welcome speaker in the St. Andrew's Society. It is interesting to note that on the Hallowe'en after his death,

thirty-seven of the forty-six poems competing for prizes contained some allusion to him, and one lamented his absence in Scotland's old dialect:

Ah! wad that he were here the nicht,  
Whase tongue was like a faerie lute!  
But vain the wish: McGee! thy might  
Lies low in death—thy voice is mute.  
He's gane, the noblest o' us a'—  
Aboon a' care o' worldly fame;  
An' wha sae proud as he to ca'  
Our Canada his hame?

The gentle maple weeps an' waves  
Aboon our patriot-statesman's heed;  
But if we prize the licht he gave,  
We'll bury feuds of race and creed.  
For this he wrocht, for this he died;  
An' for the luve we bear his name,  
Let's live as brithers, side by side,  
In Canada, our hame.

These simple Scotch verses strike the most memorable fact respecting McGee. His name should live in Canadian History as a statesman, orator, and poet. But he should be remembered for an additional reason. The Dominion, for which he laboured, grew, as

he prophesied that it would grow, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and its scattered provinces, flattened out over a vast territory, are bound together by the steel lines of trans-continental railways. Yet such material bases of union must fail to hold together the different sects and races inhabiting the Dominion, unless Canadians cherish what McGee passionately advanced, the spirit of toleration and goodwill as the best expression of Canadian nationality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

No adequate biography of Thomas D'Arcy McGee has hitherto been written. Consequently the student of his life must depend upon sundry sources of information. Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's books, *Young Ireland* (New York, 1881), *Four Years of Irish History* (London, 1883), and *My Life in Two Hemispheres* (London, 1898) contain material on McGee's adventures as a Young Irishman.

For the study of his Canadian career, his own *Speeches and Addresses, chiefly on the Subject of British-American Union* (London, 1865) is of prime interest. This volume comprises his leading speeches on the subject of Confederation, but many more of his addresses must be sought for in the columns of Canadian newspapers, particularly in the *Montreal Gazette*. The *Canadian Freeman*, published in Toronto from 1858 to 1869, was a Catholic paper which gave special place to

McGee's views. Of course, the *New Era* is also of interest. In the *British American Magazine* for August and October, 1863, McGee wrote articles on British American nationality. A few of his remarks in parliament on the same subject may be found in Thompson's *Mirror of Parliament* for 1860. Much interesting material will be found in the *Memoirs of Ralph Vansittart* (Toronto, 1924) by Edward Robert Cameron, a personal friend of McGee. W. A. Foster, *Canada First* (Toronto, 1890; with intr. by Goldwin Smith) is worth consulting for a contemporary opinion on McGee's influence over the younger generation of Canadians. George W. Ross, *Getting into Parliament and After* (Toronto, 1913) has a good, if brief, description of McGee as an orator. Joseph Pope, *The Memoirs of the Right Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald* (Ottawa, 1894) contains some information of interest. The *Macdonald Papers* in the Dominion Archives, have a fund of material on the movement of Confederation, with which McGee was so intimately connected. Sir Charles Tupper, *Recollections of*

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of *Canadian Nationality* (University of Manitoba, 1923) describes McGee as a Canadian nationalist and quotes from his speeches.

McGee's collected poems were edited and published by Mrs. Sadlier (New York, 1869). Mrs. Sadlier's introduction contains some valuable information concerning McGee's life.

The following is a list of the more important of McGee's other books: *O'Connell and His Friends* (Boston, 1845); *Historical Sketches of Irish Settlers in America* (Boston, 1855); *Catholic History of North America* (Boston, 1855); *Life of Bishop Maginn* (New York, 1857); *Canadian Ballads and Occasional Verses* (Toronto, 1858); *The Irish Writers of the 17th Century* (Dublin, 1863); *Popular History of Ireland* (New York, 1863); and *Notes on Federal Governments Past and Present* (Montreal, 1865).











